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WEMBLEY HERE WE COME

Carabao Cup final preview

VAMOS LUIS DIAZ

MEET THE NEW MAN WITH MAGIC IN HIS BOOTS

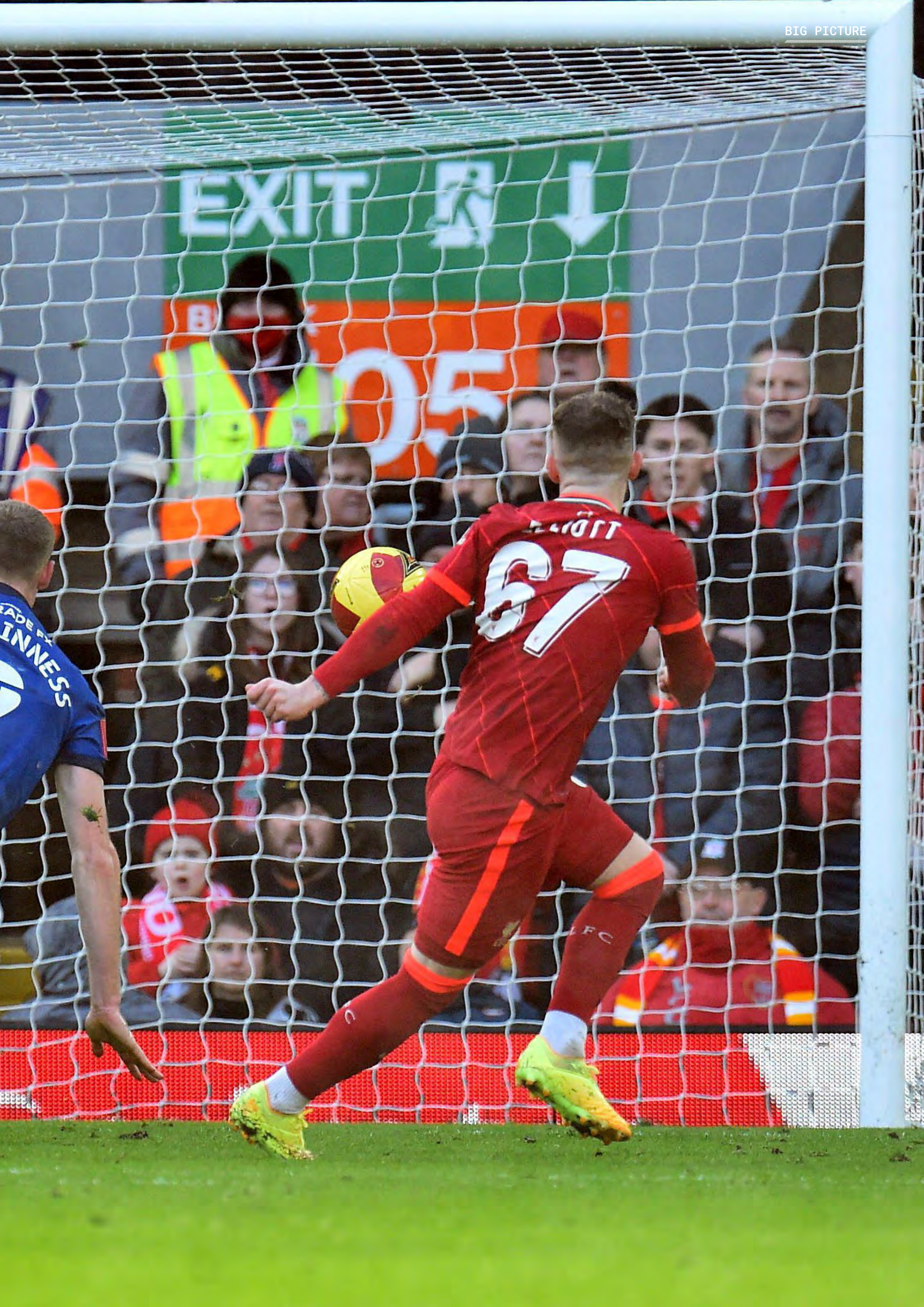
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LOOK WHO'S BACK

Harvey Elliott turns and fires home Liverpool's third goal in their win over Cardiff City at Anfield in the FA Cup fourth round. "I'm conscious of overplaying the situation with Harvey because it's critically important now we all realise he will still need time and patience to fully reintegrate and get to the consistent levels we expect of him and he expects of himself," wrote Jürgen Klopp in his subsequent matchday programme notes. "But you'd need a heart of stone not to be moved by what happened. What a moment."


EXIT
67



NO WONDER LFC WOMEN HAVE BEEN CEREAL WINNERS THIS SEASON

CORNER TAKEN QUICKLY



Just like Barcelona in 2019, the page where you don't know what to expect...

5 LIVERPOOL LU'S

LUis Garcia
LUis Suarez
LUis Alberto
LUis Longstaff
LUis Diaz

OUR LADS HAVE COME FROM ALL OVER THE PLACE

Kostas Tsimikas (Thessaloniki, Greece)

Considered to be Greece's capital of culture, Thessaloniki is the second largest city in the country with the metropolitan area having a population of over one million. In May 1996, Konstantinos Tsimikas – to give him his full name – added to that number.

Thessaloniki was founded in 315 BC, a few years before LFC, by Cassander of Macedon and named after his missus Thessalonike, a Macedonian princess who was the sister of Alexander the Great. Greek legend has it that she lives on as a mermaid who passes judgement on sailors that encountered her. Sounds fishy.

The biggest football club in Thessaloniki is PAOK, whose supporters invented the chant that Kopites sing 'Oh Campione' to, while the Kaftanzoglio Stadium in the city hosted the 1973 European Cup Winners' Cup final between AC Milan and Leeds. Milan won 1-0.

Twinned with 19 other cities, including San Francisco, Marseille and Melbourne, it is one of the largest seaports in the eastern Mediterranean and was ranked by *National Geographic* Magazine as one of the best 20 places to visit for tourists.

They recommend trying Thessaloniki's signature sweet, *trigon* – a syrup-soaked baklava stuffed with cream. Maybe not before a match though, eh Kostas?

DIRK KUYT REVELATION OF THE MONTH #1 •

"There's a big supermarket chain in Holland called DIRK so when I was playing at Feyenoord the fans all brought their bags into the stands."



BLAGGING IT

One of these Bob Paisley facts is true, the others are made up. Take a punt if you don't know...

- **Bob Paisley was nicknamed 'Geordie' as a Liverpool player due to being from the North East.**
- **Bob Paisley was nicknamed 'Gee-Gee' as a Liverpool player due to his love of horse-racing.**
- **Bob Paisley was nicknamed 'Gunner' as a Liverpool player due to his rank in the army.**

Answer: It has long been forgotten, but Bob was known as 'Gunner' during his playing days after serving as an anti-tank gunner with Montgomery's Eighth Army, aka 'the Desert Rats' in World War II. He was never known as Geordie or Gee-Gee.

RANDOM CHANT OF THE MONTH

Wem-ber-lee, Wem-ber-lee,
We're the greatest team in Europe
And we're going to Wem-ber-lee...

LFC's win-percentages in March when the year ends in a 2

Year	Played	Won	%
1902:	P5	W2	40%
1912:	P5	W0	0%
1922:	P5	W2	40%
1932:	P7	W3	49.2%
1942:	N/A		
1952:	P5	W1	20%
1962:	P6	W3	50%
1972:	P5	W4	80%
1982:	P8	W6	75%
1992:	P8	W4	50%
2002:	P7	W6	85.7%
2012:	P6	W2	33%



ALISSON WITH ANOTHER IRON MAN-OF-THE-MATCH DISPLAY THERE...



OUR KID FROM COLOMBIA

Luis Diaz has everything in his locker to become one of Liverpool's most exciting players – and he's delighted to be here a little earlier than planned


Expedia
23



I grew up wearing the number 23 back in Colombia as a young player and things went well for me. That is what gave me the idea to choose it again and wear it here

Words: Chris McLoughlin

His name is Luis Diaz, he wears the famous Red, and while the 25-year-old forward is the first Colombian to have played for Liverpool FC, he isn't the first Luis Diaz. Kind of.

A certain Luis Suarez, a January signing for the Reds eleven years ago, is Luis Alberto Suarez Diaz when known by his full name.

But he isn't, and nor is Luis Fernando Diaz Maruland, who was born in Barrancas, Colombia, on 13 January 1997. He's come a long way from there in a quarter-of-a-century to get to Liverpool.

"He was born in one of the poorest regions of the country, La Guajira, where kids die of starvation and access to clean water is scarce," Colombian football writer Juan Felipe Sierra Luis told *The Athletic*. "Luis was so thin as a kid that he was nicknamed 'fideo' [noodle]."

Now, as an adult professional footballer there is nothing skinny about his numbers. In two-and-a-half seasons at Porto he scored 41 goals and provided 19 assists in 125 appearances. Sixteen of those goals came this season – 10 with his right foot and three apiece with his left and head – including home and away strikes against AC Milan in the Champions League.

Having previously netted against Manchester City and Marseille in the Champions League, plus Feyenoord, Bayer Leverkusen and Rangers (when managed by Steven Gerrard) in the Europa League, he has proved that he isn't just a forward who racks up the goals in a domestic league which, with all due respect, is weaker than the Premier League.

He is also a player whom Jürgen Klopp had tracked long before Liverpool played Porto this season: "We signed him because we like pretty much everything about him. I followed him now for a while, not only since we played them twice in the Champions League.

"He's an exceptional player. He has the speed, he has the skill-set, he has the character to have a really good career. We all want him to have this career here with us."

Diaz was a teenager when playing in the Indigenous Copa America in Chile in 2015. Scouts took note of his displays – he scored twice as Colombia finished runners-up – and it was Colombian second-tier outfit Barranquilla FC who captured his signature, slotting him into their newly-formed U18s team before handing the right-footed, left-sided forward a senior debut in April 2016.

After 42 appearances he moved to Barranquilla FC's top-flight parent club Junior de Barranquilla (generally known as Junior) in 2017 and was handed the no23 shirt, which he now wears for Liverpool.

"That's where I took my first steps in the game, so I grew up wearing that number and things went well for me," he told liverpoolfc.com's James Carroll. "That is what gave me the idea to choose it again and wear it here."

In September 2018 he made his international debut for Colombia as a substitute against Argentina in the MetLife Stadium, New Jersey. His first goal for his country followed against South Korea in March 2019 and he now has seven in 33 appearances for *Los Cafeteros* (the Coffee-growers) including four during the 2021 Copa America in Brazil.

One of those goals came against Brazil in the group stage, although Alisson wasn't in goal and it was later cancelled out by some fella called Bobby Firmino before Casemiro scored a winner in stoppage-time.

Colombia lost on penalties in the semi-final to eventual winners Argentina and Diaz finished the tournament as joint-leading scorer alongside Lionel Messi.

His displays in the Copa America elevated Diaz to be considered Colombia's most important player and he admits there has been huge interest there in his move to Liverpool.

"Back home in my country it's been like a bombshell! It's been absolutely crazy – una locura like we say over there.

"I'm really happy at how it's turned out because it's a fairly historic moment for Colombian football, and all the supporters there are really happy about it. So too are all my family, my friends and my parents.

"As I say, it's been totally mad over there and thanks to God everything has managed to come off and the deal has gone through."

Known for cutting in from the left and scoring with his right foot, Diaz netted 20 goals in 108 games for Junior before moving to FC Porto in July 2019. Reports suggest that Carlos Queiroz was among those to convince him to move to Portugal.

Now manager of Egypt and Mo Salah, Queiroz had been appointed as coach of Colombia five months earlier and while he is best-known in England for being assistant-manager of Manchester United during two spells either side of being boss of Real Madrid, he also has a Liverpool connection who proved instrumental in securing Diaz's signature ahead of other clubs.

LFC assistant sporting director Julian Ward, who takes over from Michael Edwards as sporting director at the end of the season, worked on the deal. He previously worked under Queiroz as head of analysis for the Portuguese national team from 2008 to 2010.



Lisbon-based Ward watched a lot of Portuguese football and knows the league well. With the Reds also having ex-Porto coaches Pep Lijnders and Vitor Matos on the coaching staff, Klopp didn't have to look far to get informed verdicts on his new forward.

Diaz was a summer target but when a turn of events meant that he was available in January the Reds swooped with club officials flying out to South America to get the deal done while Luis was on World Cup qualifying duty with Colombia.

"I could not be happier that we've been able to get this deal done and bring Luis to Liverpool," said the Reds boss.



I could not be happier that we've been able to get this deal done and bring Luis to Liverpool

"I have always been a believer in only signing players in January if you would want to sign them in the summer, and that's very much the case with Luis.

"We believe he has everything needed to fit into our way and adapt to the Premier League, both physically and mentally. He is a player who is hungry for success and knows you have to fight to get what you want. He is a fighter, no doubt. He's a skilful team player who has always the goal in mind.

"When we played against Luis earlier this season, we saw what a danger he is, how fast he is and how his mentality was to help his team."

Luis says the prospect of playing for both Liverpool and Klopp was simply too good to turn down. "Liverpool is a club that I've followed for a good while now, and I've always watched them play.

"It's no secret that the Premier League is one of the best leagues around and I've followed the football here and watched it since I was a boy.

"I don't think I need to say much about Liverpool that hasn't been said. It's a great club which has won many cups and league titles, and so Liverpool has always been my choice.

"It excites me a lot knowing that I am going to have a manager of his [Jürgen Klopp's] standing and stature. You could see that for yourself both times we came up against Liverpool with Porto, you could tell he was a good person and that not only on the football side of things but he takes care of the personal side of things as well.







"At first it is going to be a settling-in period and a chance to grow alongside my team-mates and the manager and his coaching staff. Here's hoping that he helps me a lot in my career as a professional player."

It didn't take Diaz too long into his Liverpool debut against Cardiff City in the FA Cup to make an impact. Wearing short sleeves and gloves, he was brought on for Curtis Jones in the 58th minute and ten minutes later he had an assist.

After pressing Perry Ng close to the byline he tackled the Cardiff full-back, spun to keep the ball in, used a flash of skill to beat Aden Flint and although his pull-back nutmegged Diogo Jota the ball ran to Takumi Minamino, who side-footed it into the net. He turned to the Kop, arms raised, to enjoy his first on-pitch celebration as a Liverpool player. There'll be many more to come.

"I think I can bring a lot to the team in terms of my pace and my skill and technique on the ball and ability to dribble," he said. "They are a couple of my strengths. Also, I can score goals.

"I am going to give absolutely everything I've got, 100 per cent, to help my team as much as I can and hopefully make the fans really happy."

There was a scare when he later went down clutching his knee after an aerial challenge. But it later transpired that Bluebirds skipper Flint had accidentally trodden on him, leaving the new boy with a cut knee-cap but able to continue.

"It is just a bruise and a little cut," Klopp told ITV Sport. "It is 'welcome to England'. He may have a scar in the end."

If Liverpool's season continues as it has started then he may also have a medal or two around his neck by the end. Diaz arrives on Merseyside with Liverpool still in contention to win four competitions and, thanks to a rule-change a few years back, he is not cup-tied in the Champions League despite having played against the Redmen for Porto.

The Reds return to the San Siro on 16 February to play Internazionale in the last 16 first leg, but it is the home leg on 8 March that Diaz – who has replaced Nat Phillips in the Champions League squad – is already excited to experience.

"I will be really happy when that moment comes around, to be on the field and be able to play in the Champions League at such a big club against other big clubs," he said. "It is going to be a really proud moment for me.

"Being in a packed Anfield, too, I have already had the chance to try it before when I came here playing for Porto against Liverpool. You can really feel the atmosphere of how the crowd lives for the game.

"It is going to be, as I said, a really proud moment."

However the season pans out for Liverpool, there's no doubt that Luis Diaz is up there with Luis Suarez as one of the club's most exciting January transfers.

Can our first Colombian have the same impact as our first Uruguayan did? Only time will tell, but he is certainly going to give it his best shot.

"I'm committed to being available from the very first day. My mindset is that I'm ready to help out my team and do my bit and contribute, being ready to play whenever I'm asked.

"I'm very happy and pleased to be here at this great team and this great club."

I'm committed to being available from the very first day. My mindset is that I'm ready to help out my team and do my bit and contribute, being ready to play whenever I'm asked. I'm very happy and pleased to be here at this great team and this great club





VIRGIL'S FINAL COUNTDOWN

The centre-half on what it means to play in a Wembley final, and how the Anfield atmosphere has inspired the players



VIRGIL, CONGRATULATIONS ON REACHING THE CARABAO CUP FINAL – WHAT DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU?

Obviously we are all looking forward to playing in the final. We knew it was going to be tough in the second leg at Arsenal but we were also full of confidence. We knew that we were capable of playing such a good game.

There were moments when we were under pressure, especially at the beginning of the first half when they had their fans behind them, but after that period we did very well and it was a well-deserved win in the end.

YOU CAME THROUGH THE TWO LEGS OF THE SEMI-FINAL WITHOUT MO SALAH, SADIO MANE AND NABY KEITA TOO…

We did on those nights but obviously they are very important players for us, first and foremost. To succeed in producing the numbers they produce is incredible, but the situation was what it was. They had the Africa Cup of Nations and we had to deal with it and the other players had to step up.

I think we all did and Diogo obviously helped us a lot with his two goals.



THE GAME AT THE EMIRATES ALSO SAW TRENT ALEXANDER-ARNOLD TAKE HIS TALLY OF ASSISTS THIS SEASON TO AN INCREDIBLE 14 BY MID-JANUARY…

We have so much quality throughout the whole team in my opinion.

Trent is another whose numbers speak for themselves. He is a special player for us and we can be very happy that he is performing at such a high level. That's important for us but I thought on the night it was a fantastic team performance we could be very proud of.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB TO BE IN FINALS AGAIN?

We all want to win trophies, first of all. I think we'll see what this season brings. We're in the final but of course it's going to be very tough against Chelsea because they are a fantastic team as well. Obviously we will look forward to the challenge but the only thing we can do now is focus on the game ahead of us.

WHAT WILL BE THE KEY TO TAKING THE TROPHY BACK TO LIVERPOOL?

Like I say, Chelsea are a fantastic team with fantastic individual quality, a great manager and structure, so it's going to be tough and we will have to prepare well. But we have the qualities too to make it very tough for them and beat them. So when the time comes we will prepare and then we'll see.

I'm definitely looking forward to it. It's a chance to get a trophy and we will give everything we have to try and take the cup home with us. But first we had so many games between the semi-final and the final in all the competitions: FA Cup, Premier League and Champions League.

In the week leading up to it, the focus will be on that cup final. But before that we will focus on the other things.



YOU FOLLOWED UP THE WIN AT THE EMIRATES WITH ANOTHER SUCCESS IN THE CAPITAL AT CRYSTAL PALACE, CUTTING MANCHESTER CITY'S LEAD – WAS THAT ON YOUR MINDS?

You can't deny that's on your mind but as we've said many times – all of us I think – we take it game-by-game. It sounds a bit boring but it is like that.

We have no influence on the other teams, especially what Man City or Chelsea are doing at the moment, for example. We are not looking at them because there's no point. We are only in February and there are so many games to play in the many different competitions. So we just focus on ourselves.

The win at Crystal Palace was a very, very important one and hopefully we can build on that as we approach the decisive part of the season.

IT CERTAINLY CAPPED OFF A GOOD WEEK FOR YOU…

Yes, we had a good week just before a well-deserved break. Hopefully everyone will have been able to re-charge and get ready for the next part of the season and we are all looking forward to it. We are still in all the competitions, so we're going to give it everything and we'll see where it leads us at the end of the season.





LOOKING AT THE PREMIER LEAGUE OVERALL, WHO DO YOU THINK IS THE BEST PLAYER YOU HAVE PLAYED AGAINST IN THE COMPETITION AND WHY?

I would say Kevin De Bruyne has been unbelievable. His vision is incredible and he's just a fantastic player. N'Golo Kante is always going to be there too and he's another incredible player.

There are so many fantastic players in the Premier League, it's the best league in the world in my opinion and we should all appreciate it and enjoy it. But I would say one of those guys would definitely be up there.

You see them more because they are in the midfield, so you have a closer look, and they know just when to pass the ball to the strikers. So you always have to be on your toes when those guys are on the ball.

APART FROM ANFIELD, WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PREMIER LEAGUE STADIUM TO PLAY AT?

I like playing in every stadium so that's a bit of a difficult question to answer. Obviously I enjoyed my time at Southampton so I would say St Mary's. That was where I enjoyed starting my Premier League career.

Then there's Arsenal's stadium, the Emirates. Stamford Bridge. Elland Road, too – there's always a great atmosphere there. Aston Villa. I'm just enjoying playing my football in any stadium, whether it's hostile or quiet or our fans have the better of the stadium.

It's always a pleasure to be out there playing on fantastic football pitches in front of so many fans. It's an incredible feeling and that will never change.

AS FOR THE ANFIELD ATMOSPHERE, WHAT IS IT LIKE AS A PLAYER TO PERFORM IN FRONT OF THAT WALL OF NOISE?

It's incredible. You know, it's something that really, really gives you a boost and it can also de-motivate the opponent. We've seen that many times. It's a very important part of our success as a club, that unity we have with our fans. And we have to keep using that because obviously it's a big advantage for us and we want to keep that going.



FOOTBALL FIRSTS

YOUR FIRST PAIR OF FOOTBALL BOOTS

Nike. I've been with Nike almost all of my playing days. I had a period with a different brand but Nike is my family and basically from day one, that was already the case.



FIRST FOOTBALL SHIRT

A Brazilian Ronaldinho one. I was a massive fan of Ronaldinho.



FIRST FOOTBALLER YOU LOOKED UP TO

Ronaldinho again! He was such a fantastic footballer. If you speak to any of the players from my age-group, they would also agree with that. He was the player with a lot of fun: tricks, goals, celebrations. I tried to recreate a lot of his skills when I played on the streets back in the day.

FIRST MEMORY OF PLAYING FOOTBALL

That's also a difficult question to answer. Obviously football has been a part of my life since I can remember – playing at school and in front of the house.

FIRST GROUND YOU PLAYED ON AS A PRO

I made my debut in Holland for Groningen when I was 19 at Den Haag. It was an away game and we won it 4-2, so it was a case of happy days in the end. It was a big day for me. I remember it was on the first of May 2011.



FIRST GOAL

My first goal as a professional was a fast free-kick actually. It was also against Den Haag in a [UEFA Europa League] play-off game and I think it was four weeks after I had made my debut. It was the first goal of a comeback that was very important for us as a team, so I will never ever forget that one.



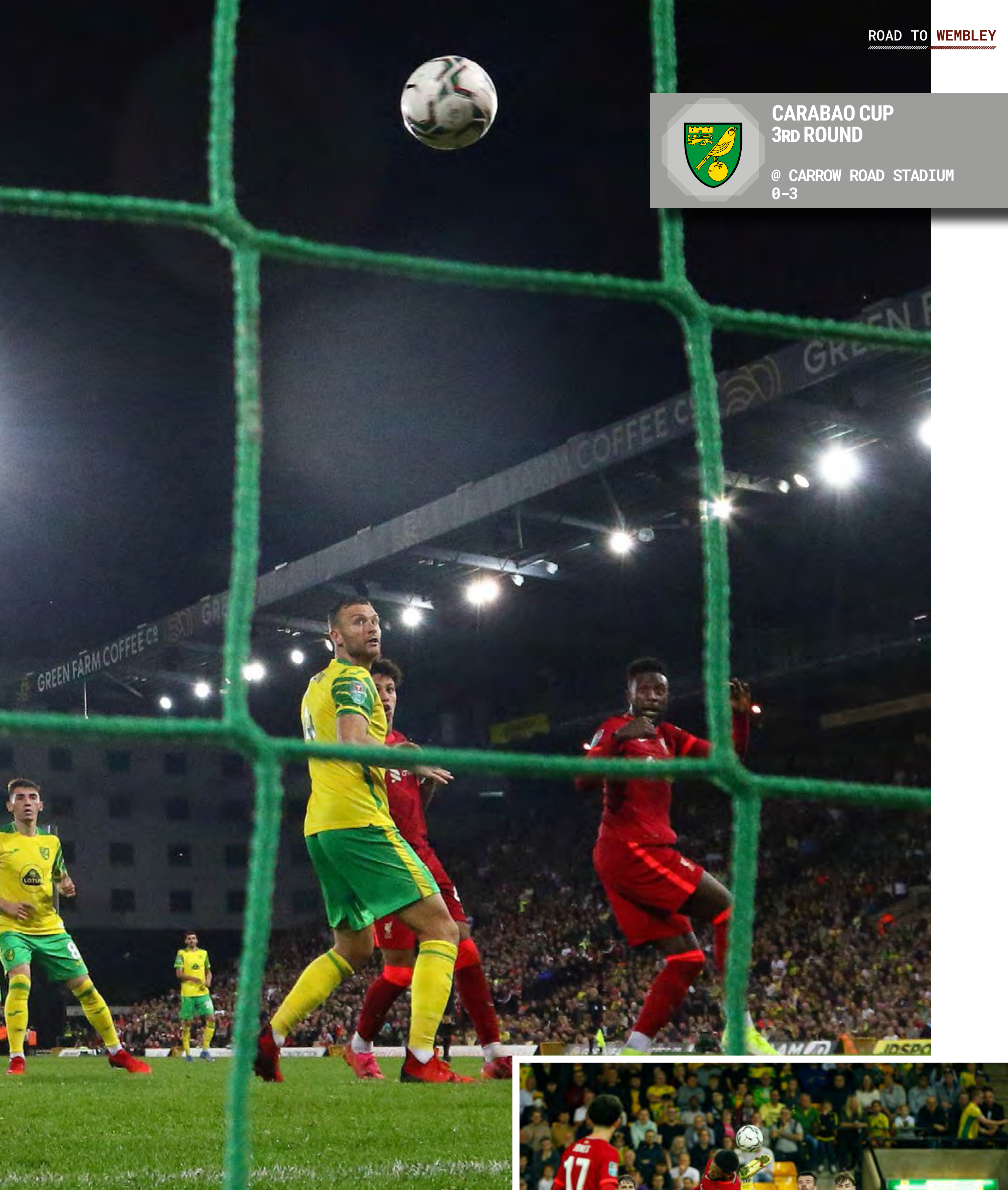
"IT'S GOLD FOR YOUNG PLAYERS – PROPER GOLD"

The kids have most definitely played their part in helping Liverpool to reach the Carabao Cup final this season, with the seniors also starring as the tournament got even tougher – let's go through it round by round

What was that about big teams not taking this tournament seriously? Six months ago Liverpool's Carabao Cup adventure began with a third-round tie at newly-promoted Norwich City and some fascinating pre-match insight from Pep Lijnders.

Ahead of the trip to Carrow Road last September, the assistant-manager was asked about team-selection. "You have to understand our way, our identity, our culture – what already started a long time ago," he replied. "We want to compete in each game and in these intense periods where you play each three days, it's really important to, one, protect the players because it's a high-risk to play again and again and again.

"And second, if you want to compete in the way we want to compete – chasing the opposition and having fresh legs, having a fresh mind, having a fresh heart, having fresh lungs – then it's important that you use what we call 'energisers' – so players who can come in and inspire the others with their game. So that's what we are going to do."



CARABAO CUP 3RD ROUND

@ CARROW ROAD STADIUM
0-3

Lijnders went on: “Our team is hungry, our squad is hungry to compete in each competition – and this is one of them. Everybody says we don’t like these competitions but we do, because I feel this generation of players, this Liverpool team, deserves to fight as well for the national cups.

“It’s gold for young players – proper gold – because we like this competition to introduce new players.”

Making his 50th appearance for Liverpool was Curtis Jones, who three years earlier had been on the bench for a third-round tie

at home to Chelsea before making his senior Reds debut in the FA Cup at Wolves.

This time there were starting debuts for defender Conor Bradley and winger Kaide Gordon, with midfielder Tyler Morton coming on for Naby Keita at half-time. It was Takumi Minamino, though, who stole the show with two goals in a 3-0 win, while keeper Caoimhin Kelleher saved a penalty and Joe Gomez captained the side for the first time.

The Japanese international fired home the opener from Divock Origi's flick-on in the fourth minute. Then Kelleher prevented Norwich from equalising with a fine spot-kick save from teenage winger Christos Tzolis.

Origi headed in Liverpool's second from a Kostas Tsimikas cross soon after the break before Taki squeezed home a third from Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain's pass to become the first player to net his opening six LFC goals away from Anfield.

The Guardian called this one right in its match report: "Liverpool cruised into the fourth round and suggested that, should they fancy it, they have the depth for a serious tilt at their first League Cup win since 2012."

Afterwards Jürgen Klopp discussed the half-time tweaks which enabled Liverpool to secure victory.

"Curtis in the half-space and Tyler in the six and it looked much [more] natural immediately, so then the boys passed quicker, passed smarter and we changed Oxlade, a little bit higher on the pitch on the left wing, and Taki, who is obviously in really good shape, more in the centre and half-spaces, so Ox could use his speed and Taki connected the game together with Tyler and Curtis.

"So it was all good. The kids did exceptionally well, I have to say. I am really happy for them, it was a big moment for all three. The first thing Kaide said to me after the game, when I wanted to say 'congratulations', he said to me, 'Thank you!'

"I said, 'Nothing to thank me for – you deserved it'."













“ALL ABOUT GETTING THROUGH”





Freshness was the aim ahead of the fourth-round trip to Deepdale to face Championship side Preston North End, in front of the Sky Sports cameras in late October. The Reds arrived in high spirits after their 5-0 win at Manchester United the previous Sunday, but Jürgen Klopp made wholesale changes with Liverpool also in the midst of a Champions League double-header with Atletico Madrid.

Again it was Pep Ljinders who explained the approach beforehand: "If you want to be good in the first game of the season, the ninth game of the season and the 38th game of the season, two things are important.

"The first is consistency – consistency in our ideas, so the way we want to play, the way we want to set up, the way we want to show our mentality. That's really important, what we do each day to prepare.

"The second thing is using the squad because we know that we need [to have] in our game freshness and we need unpredictability. We need creativity – we know that fatigue stops that.

CARABAO CUP
4TH ROUND

@ DEEPDALE STADIUM
0-2









"If you want a team who shows hunger, who shows the will to put their game into place, to be dominant and control the game in that way, then it's important to use the squad."

As it was, the Reds had injury concerns, too. James Milner was ruled out until the November international-break after sustaining a hamstring issue at Old Trafford, while Naby Keita was recovering from the injury which forced him off in the same game.

Fabinho had yet to recover from a knock on the knee, and neither Thiago nor Caoimhin Kelleher were ready for action.

Adrian duly started in goal, winger Harvey Blair made his LFC debut and Tyler Morton his first start, while defender Owen Beck came off the bench late on for his senior bow.

Previewing the game, Preston boss Frankie McAvoy said: "I think it's a fantastic occasion for our supporters to come and enjoy. You might never get an opportunity [again] to play against arguably one of the top three clubs in world football at the moment."

Indeed PNE had the better of the play in the first half, with Adrian denying first Brad Potts then Sean Maguire, and Neco Williams clearing almost off the line. After the break, though, the Reds took the lead through Takumi Minamino, who volleyed a Williams cross home on 62 minutes.

Then came a moment of Divock Origi magic. Left-back Kostas Tsimikas saw his overhit cross strike the bar and the ball fell to Williams whose blocked shot flew up behind Origi, who somehow back-heeled it in the air over his head and into the net.

"We didn't play well, that's how it is," admitted Klopp post-match. "As a team we can play better, but it's all about getting through to the next round. That's what we did."

On Tyler Morton's display on his full debut, the boss beamed: "Tyler is obviously a real talent, a real smart footballer – you can see this. His natural movements, natural positions, are really good, so he is a real football-smart boy and the technique is also really good.

"Now we have to make sure we help him with getting a body for football – he is not too small and not too skinny, but there is still a little bit to come and we have to make him ready for all that."

And as for the goalscorers? "Taki is high-quality. He is in an outstanding moment, training-wise much better than he showed tonight, but he was the most dangerous player and scores a goal, which is really important.

"Divock's goal was just Divock Origi. It was obviously not a striker's game because we didn't play that well and it is difficult for the strikers, but the goal he scored was quite special."



"THE BOYS WERE JUST OUTSTANDING"

The quarter-finals of the 2021/22 tournament looked like this: Arsenal v Sunderland, Brentford v Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur v West Ham United, and Liverpool v Leicester City, with the ties to be played just before Christmas, on 21 and 22 December.

Young centre-back Billy Koumetio was set to make his first competitive start as the Reds made ten changes from the weekend's Premier League draw at Spurs, with only Tyler Morton retaining his place.

Jordan Henderson returned in midfield after illness, while Roberto Firmino was back after recovering from injury.

In his matchday programme notes Jürgen Klopp was effusive in his praise for his Foxes counterpart. "When Brendan Rodgers returns here, he does so of course as an opponent but also as a great friend of our club. A friendship based on shared past experiences and fellowship; a friendship from LFC's side based on gratitude for his huge contribution to the progress this club has made in the past decade.

"All that said, the friendship is paused for the 90 minutes – that much is clear for both sides… Today we are rivals and we

CARABAO CUP 5TH ROUND

@ ANFIELD STADIUM
3-3 (5-4 ON PENS)



desperately want to end their participation in this cup competition. There is a semi-final place up for grabs. We want it and so do they. So let's go. Game-on."

And what a game. Barely 13 minutes into proceedings the 52,000 crowd could have been forgiven for thinking that the tie looked virtually lost, with Foxes striker Jamie Vardy scoring his ninth and tenth career goals against the Reds, at the Kop-end too.

Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain pulled one back with a well-taken strike soon after, on 19 minutes. But before the interval James Maddison made it 3-1 with a long-range strike beating Reds keeper Caoimhin Kelleher, and Vardy almost completed his hat-trick but for his shot to cannon off the post.

Tie over? Not quite. A triple half-time substitution by Klopp stirred the hosts into life and one of the replacements, Diogo Jota, made it 3-2 with a left-footed finish, and another, Naby Keita, forced Foxes goalie Kasper Schmeichel into a flying save.

The clock was running down but there was something in the floodlit air. The Reds pressed relentlessly and five minutes into added-time Takumi Minamino chested down James Milner's cross and arrowed home to take the game to spot-kicks and send the stadium into raptures.

At the Anfield Road end of the ground, Kelleher saved two penalties, diving to his left to save from Luke Thomas and Ryan Bertrand. Despite Minamino missing his own effort, Jota slotted home to spark wild celebrations.

"Really, really happy," was Klopp's verdict post-match. "Really happy with the performance, with the spirit, with the mentality, [and] in a lot of moments with the football.

"First half, always when we played football we were good. When we played the right football we were good. When we played exactly in their formation, then it was not that good and then they



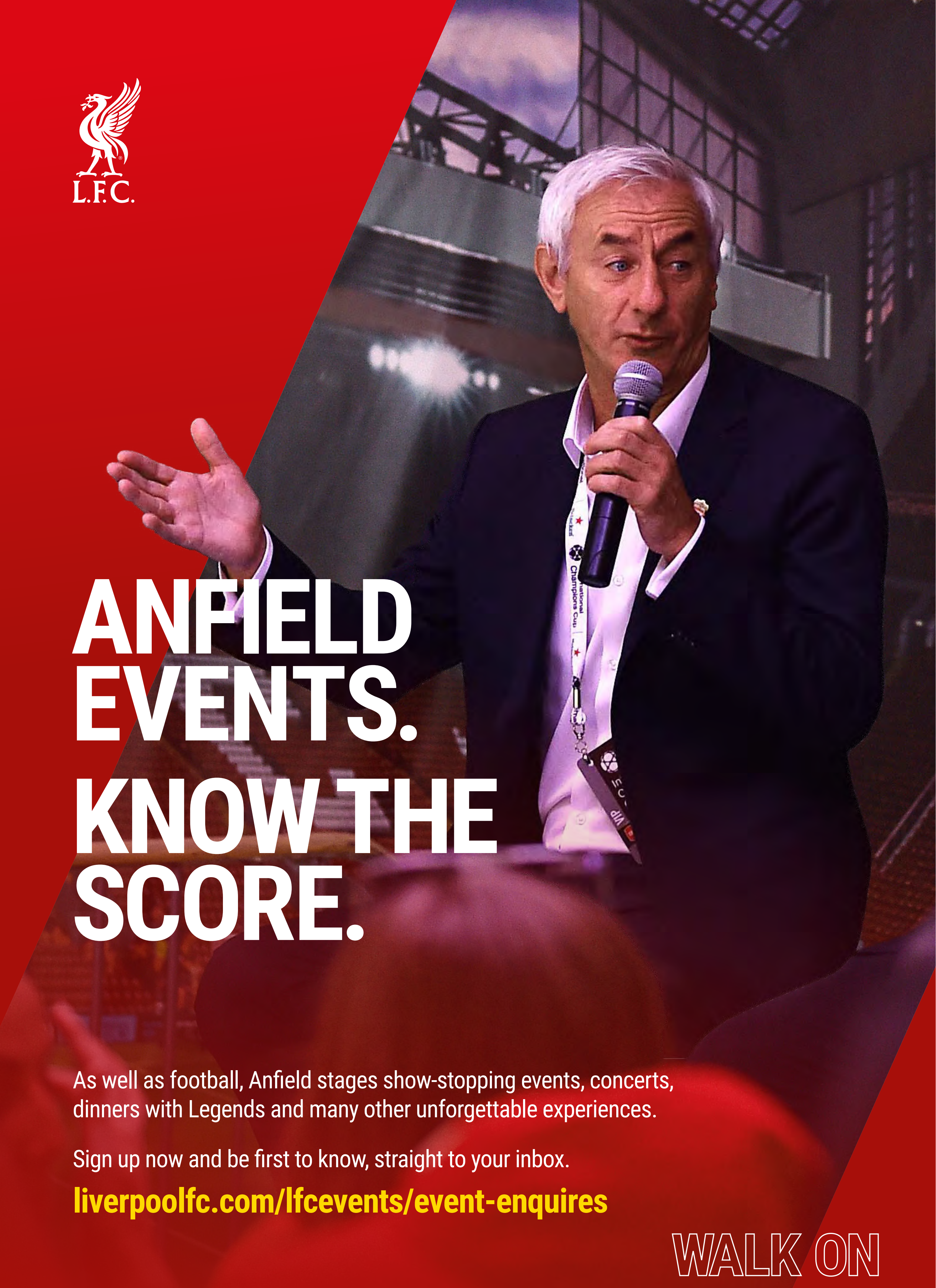

FBS
22


CHAMBERLAIN
15
MORTON
80


20


15



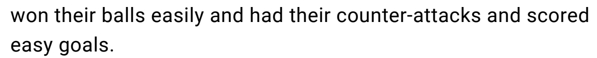

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WALK ON











won their balls easily and had their counter-attacks and scored easy goals.

"But at half-time I told the boys actually I liked the game apart from the mistakes we made around the goals and we have to improve and do better in a few moments.

"The changes [for the second half] helped, of course, when you can bring Diogo Jota in the shape he is, it's obviously very helpful. Milly too, it was clear we will now not struggle with mentality anymore – we didn't struggle but we guaranteed it for the second half as well. And then Naby when he came on, what a game he played!

"The boys were just outstanding. And in the end Caoimhin, not only with the penalties but the save from [Marc] Albrighton as well, he saved our life. So, we are in the semis. Great."





CARABAO CUP SEMI FINAL 1ST LEG

@ ANFIELD STADIUM
0-0

Never go on social media when Liverpool don't win. You'll only slide down the rabbithole of minority wailing and gnashing of teeth on the one hand, and dig after gleeful dig from rival fans on the other. So it transpired after this anticlimactic semi-final first leg at Anfield, with some short-termist Reds bemoaning the absence of Mo and Sadio and much of the football-watching world making Arsenal favourites to go through.

This first leg was originally scheduled for Thursday 6 January at the Emirates, but an increasing number of suspected positive COVID-19 cases among players and staff led the Reds to request a postponement, so here we were a week later at Anfield.

Liverpool were without Salah, Mane and Naby Keita, all competing at the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon – as were Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Thomas Partey, Mohamed Elneny and Nicolas Pepe.

Jürgen Klopp made eight changes with only Virgil van Dijk,



“IT’S NIL-NIL, HALF-TIME, LET’S GO”

Andy Robertson and Fabinho retaining their places from the previous Sunday’s win over Shrewsbury Town in the FA Cup. The hosts started with Alisson in goal – making his Carabao Cup debut – and Caoimhin Kelleher on the bench, with a back-four of Trent, Joel Matip, Virgil and Andy Robbo. In midfield it was Hendo, James Milner and Fabinho, with a front-three of Bobby, Taki and Diogo Jota.

There is a school of thought that a sending-off doesn’t necessarily do the numerically-superior team any favours, not least in a two-legged tie when the other side are away from home and already in rearguard mode.

Gunners midfielder Granit Xhaka was sent off in the 24th minute for denying Jota a goalscoring opportunity. But Liverpool had arguably played better against Arsenal’s full compliment, after which they had pretty much all of the ball but not the sharpness to convert 78 per cent worth of possession into goals.

The visitors made 46 clearances but of Liverpool’s 17 shots, only one was on target – from substitute Curtis Jones. The

best opportunity fell to Minamino late on, but with keeper Aaron Ramsdale out of his goal the Japanese forward blazed over the bar in front of the Kop. At the other end, the Reds were grateful to Alisson for a sprawling save from Bukayo Saka.

Afterwards Gunners boss Mikel Arteta declared himself "really proud of what we did today in an extremely difficult stadium, against a great opponent and playing 70 minutes with ten men. I said to them you have to pick players who are happy to go to war. You are going to have difficult moments when you suffer.

"When you play with that spirit, fight and brotherhood around the team, in the end you get rewarded. That is what happened today."

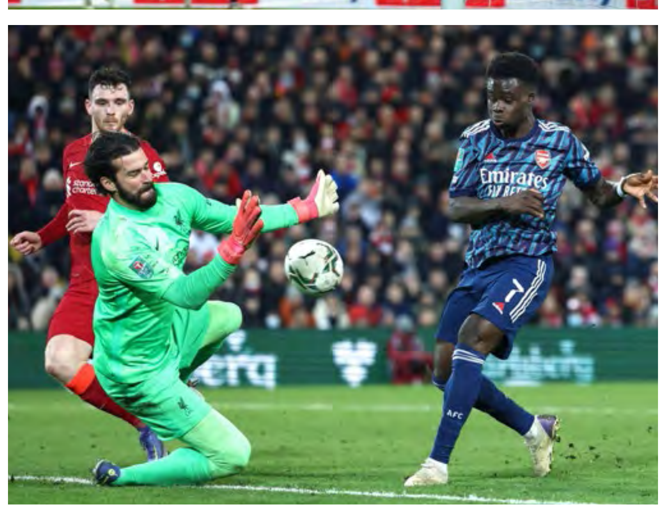
For his part Klopp was fairly sanguine: "I really liked the way we started in the game, I saw absolutely everything we wanted to see in the beginning: front-footed, lively, direct in the right moments, we switched it in the right moments.

"We started in the game like we wanted to start and then there was the red card and then we play against a low block… It looked like all of sudden we felt under pressure, which doesn't make sense but is a typical situation.

"[But] this is a cup competition, it is a two-legged semi-final, it's nil-nil, half-time, let's go. Even when probably Arsenal feels in a better position at the moment we don't feel this tie is over for us so we will give it another proper try next Thursday."










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"EVERYONE'S BUZZING ABOUT WEMBLEY"

Would a lack of firepower thwart Liverpool's bid to reach Wembley? On the evidence of a 3-0 win over Brentford in the Premier League at Anfield, three days after the hard-fought first leg and four days before the second-leg showdown at the Emirates, indeed not. The trip to Arsenal – desperate for their last chance of silverware in 2021/22 – would be daunting, obviously. But this street-fighting Reds team doesn't do fear.

Assistant-manager Pepijn Lijnders said as much in the pre-match press-conference: "I couldn't wait for this game since the final whistle at Anfield because everyone was writing us off… We are Liverpool Football Club and our team has proved that we want to attack this competition and reach finals.

"We knew, especially after last year, that we needed to create different weapons, create goals from everywhere, last passes from everywhere, dribbles from everywhere, attacks from everywhere, and not based on counter-attack or just the speed of these two boys [Mane and Salah]. They are our face, our front-line, they give us so much direction in our game.

"[But] what I like is we don't have one weapon – we have so many ways to attack – and how we are evolving as a team and developing with our positional game is important."

Sure enough it was one of those alternative attacking weapons













who inflicted fatal damage on Mikel Arteta's team in the 19th and 77th minutes of this pulsating encounter – and his new song was ringing out across the North London night sky at the end. Diogo Jota's double fired Liverpool to a first domestic cup final at Wembley since 2016.

His first came after keeper Caoimhin Kelleher, back in goal in the competition, had brilliantly finger-tipped Alexandre Lacazette's free-kick onto the crossbar and Joel Matip had seen a goal disallowed for offside. The Portuguese ace took a pass from Trent Alexander-Arnold, cut inside and weaved through the Arsenal defence before wrong-footing goalie Aaron Ramsdale with a low reverse-shot.





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WALK ON

In the second half the yellow-clad Reds weathered another early storm to strike again. Seventeen-year-old striker Kaide Gordon, who'd previously become Liverpool's youngest scorer in the FA Cup (against Shrewsbury Town) then made a cameo appearance against Brentford, fired over the bar, and centre-half Ibrahima Konate headed against the post. But Jota made no mistake with time ticking down, controlling Trent's sublime pass with his chest and chipping Ramsdale. VAR awarded the goal after an offside flag originally went up and the 5,000 travelling fans celebrated long and loud.

To compound Arsenal's misery they had sub Thomas Partey sent off late-on for two bookable offences, but by then the job was done.

The visitors' defence had stood firm. In midfield Jordan Henderson, Fabinho and Curtis Jones were all sensational. Bobby worked hard all night to harry Arsenal's players and link Liverpool's offensive play. But one man rightly hit the headlines.

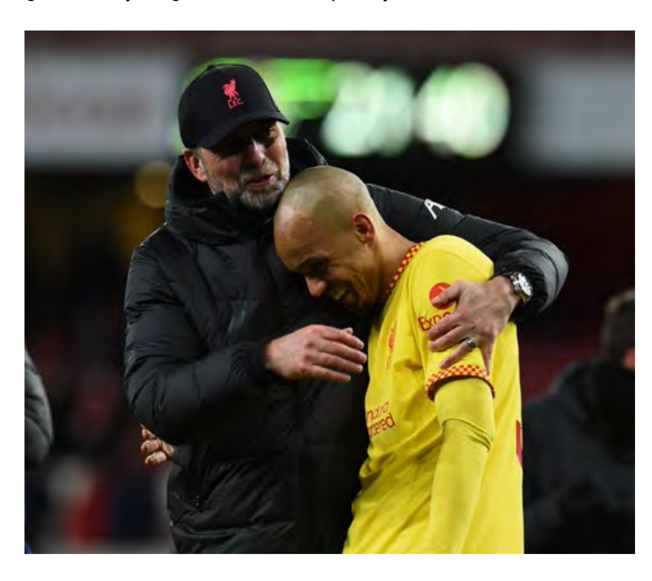
The Guardian noted: "Jota is the sort of player you tend not to notice until the critical moment, which is exactly how he managed to hurt Arsenal here… [He] was deservedly the star of the show, starting on the left with a licence to roam. This is probably his best role, allowing him to get the ball in space and use his quick feet to cut into the centre (goal one), or sit on the shoulder of the last man and attack the gap between full-back and centre-half (goal two)."

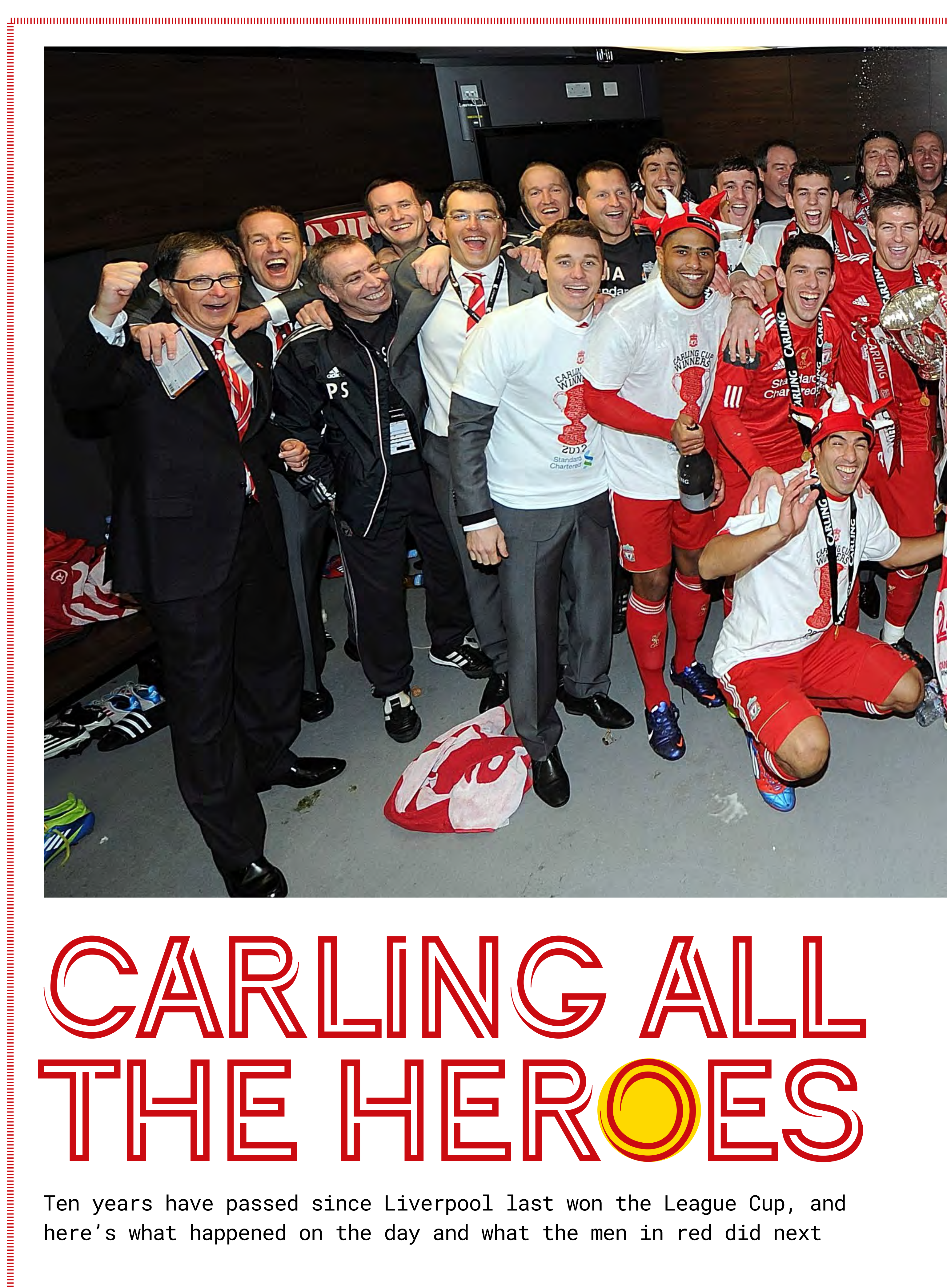
Jürgen Klopp would be taking his team to a first domestic cup final in six years, with Chelsea the opponents on Sunday 27 March. "What the boys put out tonight was really special," he said. "I saw so many outstanding performances tonight in a very important game against a really strong Arsenal side.

"Now we want to win it, but we know how difficult it will be."

The boss later confirmed that Kelleher would start the final in goal, and the 23-year-old Irishman told the club's website: "It's a great feeling and everyone's buzzing in the dressing-room and looking forward to Wembley now.

"This club obviously wants to win trophies so we will go there, give it everything we have and hopefully we can win."





CARLING ALL THE HEROES

Ten years have passed since Liverpool last won the League Cup, and here's what happened on the day and what the men in red did next



Ahead of January's first leg against Arsenal in the 2021/22 Carabao Cup semi-finals, Jordan Henderson chose to rewind a decade in his matchday programme notes to his first season as an LFC player and "what I would describe as my first big Liverpool moment." It was the semi-final of the 2011/12 tournament against Manchester City, won 3-2 by the Reds on aggregate.

"Reaching the final of the Carling Cup, as it was then, was massive for me as a young player and it was also important for us as a club because it took us back onto the big stage after a bit of a gap," he wrote.

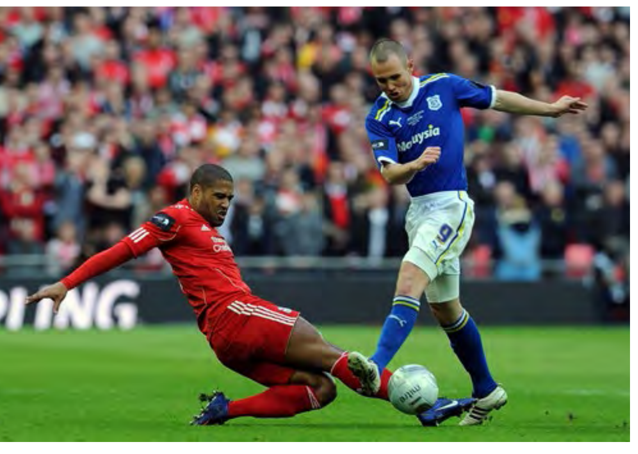
"We went on to lift the trophy at Wembley and winning silverware was obviously incredible for everyone involved. This was exactly what I had joined Liverpool for. The fact that the memories feel almost as vivid today as they did shortly after, tells you everything you need to know about the impact the occasion had on me.

"The competition's name might have changed and as a club we might have progressed quite a bit since then, but the importance of reaching a major final remains as big as ever."

In the Wembley final back then Liverpool faced second-tier Cardiff City, who'd beaten Crystal Palace on penalties in the last four. It was far from easy, and Malky Mackay's men did themselves proud. But for Kenny Dalglish's side, after an LFC absence from Wembley for 16 years, it was all about getting over the line and getting their hands on the prize.

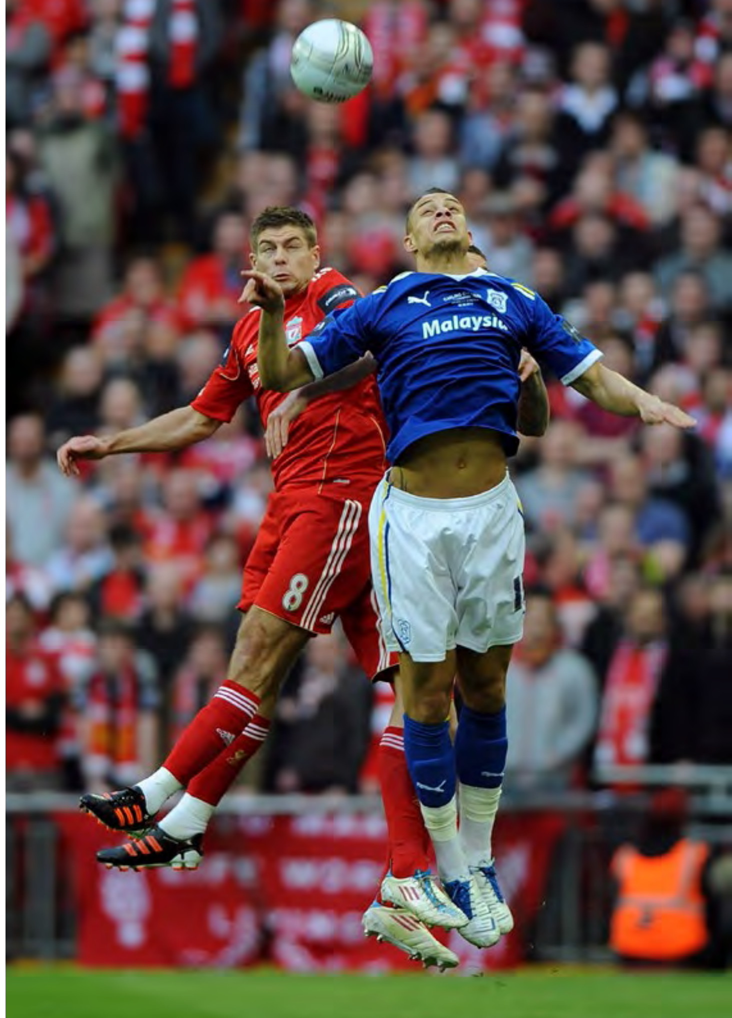
The Reds started brightly with right-back Glen Johnson hitting the woodwork in their first attack, but it was Cardiff who took the lead on 18 minutes through Joe Mason, slotting through the legs of keeper Pepe Reina after a fine short ball from Kenny Miller.

After the interval Liverpool cranked up the pressure and Henderson was replaced by Cardiff-born Craig Bellamy on the hour-mark. Within two minutes, from a Johnson corner Andy Carroll rose high to win a header which was glanced onto the post by strike-partner Luis Suarez only for centre-half Martin Skrtel, still up for the set-piece, to fire into the net.




0-1
CARDIFF







Three minutes into extra-time Reds substitute Dirk Kuyt looked to have won it. His fresh legs took him past Cardiff's tired defensive line and though his scuffed low cross was half-cleared he swept home the rebound at goalie Tom Heaton's near-post.

At that point Cardiff hadn't had a corner for nearly two hours, then came two in quick succession with two minutes left on the clock. From the second in-swinger they scored, defender Ben Turner poking home from close-range.

Liverpool had enjoyed 53 per cent possession and 39 shots but scored just twice. So to penalties. Steven Gerrard's effort was saved by Heaton via the crossbar, then Kenny Miller side-footed high against the post with Reina diving the other way.

Charlie Adam skied one. Don Cowie didn't and Cardiff were ahead. Dirk Kuyt found the bottom corner for 1-1 and fist-pumped the travelling Kop behind the goal. Rudy Gestede hit the post with Reina guessing right. One-nil after three each.

Man-of-the-match Stewart Downing picked his spot to put the Reds ahead. So did fellow left-footer Peter Whittingham to draw the Bluebirds level. Next up, Glen Johnson who found the roof of the net for 3-2. Up stepped Anthony Gerrard, cousin of Steven.

Over to BBC commentator Guy Mowbray: "Cardiff have to score. Anthony Gerrard has to score… *And Gerrard's put it wide!*

"You always knew a Gerrard would play a big part today – it's the wrong part for Cardiff City and it's sheer joy for Liverpool, who are

bringing a trophy back to that Anfield cabinet at long last again."

It meant that, 13 months after he'd returned to the Anfield hotseat, Dalglish became only the seventh manager to win all three major competitions in England. "It's a long way to win it," he admitted. "But the name's on the trophy – that's all that matters.

"Cardiff were never going to lie down – they were a great credit to their club today. It's not a nice way to win a cup, but we'll take it."

Ultimately it was a season in which Liverpool would reach the FA Cup final, too, losing 2-1 to Chelsea. In the Premier League, however, the Reds finished eighth – their joint-lowest placing since 1994 – and Kenny stepped down as boss in May 2012.







WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

PEPE REINA



Played for Napoli (initially on loan under Rafa Benitez), Bayern Munich and AC Milan before returning to the Premier League on loan with Aston Villa where he deputised for the injured Tom Heaton, who'd been in goal for Cardiff in the 2012 Carling Cup final. Still playing for Lazio, aged 39.

GLEN JOHNSON

Joined Stoke City in the summer of 2015 and made his debut in a 1-0 win over… Liverpool. Suffered injury problems with the Potters and retired from playing in January 2019. Now a property developer, owner of an investment company and occasional football pundit.

JOSE ENRIQUE



Spent four more years at Anfield and was named captain in his final game, against Exeter City in the FA Cup in January 2016. Returned to Spain to spend a year playing for Real Zaragoza before retiring. Later had surgery to remove a brain tumour and was given the all-clear in 2019.



DANIEL AGGER

Returned to hometown club Brondby in 2014 and retired from playing two years later, aged 31. Founded a sewerage company named KloAgger with his brother, uncle and childhood friend, and is currently head coach of Danish second-tier side HB Koge.

MARTIN SKRTEL



After 320 appearances and 18 goals for Liverpool – several of them memorable – he moved to Turkey to play for Fenerbahce then Istanbul Basaksehir. Last year he returned to his home country Slovakia to play for Spartak Trnava. Made 104 appearances for his country before finally hanging up his international boots.

STEVEN GERRARD

The skipper spent three more seasons with the Reds – making it 17 years in all, plus nine trophies and 114 England caps – before a year in the USA with LA Galaxy. Returned to coach at the LFC Academy then revived the fortunes of Rangers in Scotland. Back at Anfield in December 2021 as manager of Aston Villa.



KNOW THIS

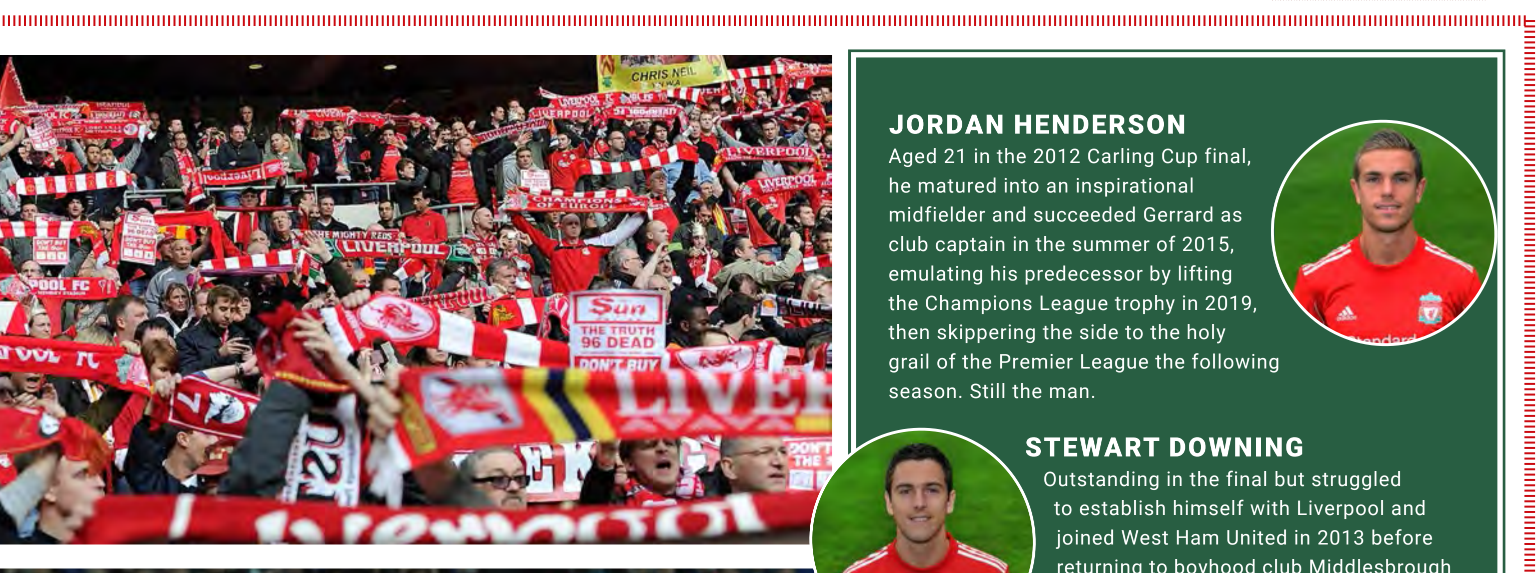
A derailed train meant there were no trains from Liverpool to London on the morning of the game – supporters had to get to Crewe, Stafford or Stoke and get a train from there.

The attendance of 89,044 was the biggest for an LFC game since the Reds beat Barcelona in the Champions League at the Nou Camp in 2007 (88,000).

The BBC revealed that the final attracted the biggest TV viewing figures in the UK since the 2010 World Cup final with more than 10 million tuning in.

It was the sixth of Liverpool's eight Wembley League Cup finals to go to extra-time (now seven of nine following the game against Manchester City in 2016).

At the time it was Liverpool's tenth penalty shoot-out win from 12 and their second at Wembley (after beating Leeds 6-5 in the 1974 Charity Shield curtain-raiser).



2-2 CARDIFF

JORDAN HENDERSON



Aged 21 in the 2012 Carling Cup final, he matured into an inspirational midfielder and succeeded Gerrard as club captain in the summer of 2015, emulating his predecessor by lifting the Champions League trophy in 2019, then skippering the side to the holy grail of the Premier League the following season. Still the man.

STEWART DOWNING



Outstanding in the final but struggled to establish himself with Liverpool and joined West Ham United in 2013 before returning to boyhood club Middlesbrough and ending his career at Blackburn Rovers. Retired in August 2021.

CHARLIE ADAM



Six months after the final, he signed for Stoke City for whom he made over 150 appearances and scored twice against the Reds, including a goal in an infamous 6-1 defeat for Liverpool at the end of the 2014/15 season. Still playing for boyhood club Dundee, aged 36.

LUIS SUAREZ



One of the greatest players to wear the red jersey, scoring 82 goals in 133 games and so nearly winning the Premier League in 2013/14. Controversy blighted his LFC career and he moved to Barcelona, winning four Spanish titles and the Champions League – but enjoying an unhappy Anfield return in the semi-finals of 2018/19 – then Atletico Madrid, claiming another La Liga medal in his first season.

ANDY CARROLL



Season 2011/12 was the last at Liverpool for the £35million man (which seemed a gargantuan fee ten years ago). When new manager Brendan Rodgers arrived, Carroll went to West Ham then hometown club Newcastle United. In January 2022, aged 33, he moved from Reading to West Brom on a short-term contract.

ALEXANDER DONI



Substitute keeper for the final, his debut came two months later in the Premier League and he made three more appearances – one of which resulted in a red card preventing him from playing in the FA Cup semi-final. Returned to Brazil and retired in 2013 due to a heart condition.






SUAREZ
7
37


CARLING


CARLING


CARLING
ALMA
GRECIA





JAMIE CARRAGHER
Came on for Daniel Agger just before extra-time to make a club-record 211th appearance in cup competitions. In May 2013 he played his 737th and final game for Liverpool in a 1-0 win over Queens Park Rangers. Given a guard-of-honour before the match and presented with a special trophy by Steven Gerrard and Ian Callaghan. Now one of football's top TV pundits.

MARTIN KELLY
On the bench at Wembley. Earlier in the season the local-born defender had scored in Liverpool's fifth-round win at Chelsea. Later sidelined with a cruciate-ligament injury, he moved to Crystal Palace in 2014 and has made over 120 appearances for the Eagles.

MAXI RODRIGUEZ
On the bench at Wembley and, like Kelly, scored against Chelsea in round five. Achieved cult status among Kopites in his two-year spell here before returning to Argentina to play for Newell's Old Boys (twice) and Penarol. Retired in November 2021, aged 40.



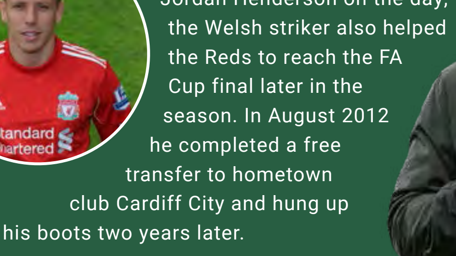
JAY SPEARING
An unused substitute but he'd previously made five appearances in the 2011/12 tournament. Played just three times the following season before leaving for Bolton Wanderers. Also played for Blackburn Rovers, Blackpool and local club Tranmere Rovers, for whom he was player of the season for 2020/21.



DIRK KUYT
Came on in extra-time at Wembley to score from open-play and in the shoot-out, and claim his only winner's medal as a Reds player. So many other memorable LFC moments for the Dutchman who subsequently won titles with Fenerbahce in Turkey and Feyenoord in the Netherlands. Retired in 2017 and now writes a column for liverpoolfc.com.



CRAIG BELLAMY
In his second spell with the club and a 58th-minute replacement for Jordan Henderson on the day, the Welsh striker also helped the Reds to reach the FA Cup final later in the season. In August 2012 he completed a free transfer to hometown club Cardiff City and hung up his boots two years later.





WELSHMEN OF ANFIELD

In a month when St David's Day is celebrated in Wales, you'll be th-Rhyl-ed to see we've picked a Welsh XI of Liverpool players past and present which could Wyn any game

Three weeks after St David's Day, on-loan Reds right-back Neco Williams hopes to play in Wales' gigantic World Cup qualifying play-off against Austria in Cardiff, with the winners taking on Scotland or Ukraine for a place at Qatar 2022.

Neco, who's spending the rest of the season with Fulham, is one of 32 Welsh-born players to make a first-team appearance for LFC.

To make this team you must have both been born in Cymru and played for *Y Dreigiau* (the Dragons) at international level, meaning the likes of Rob Jones (born in Wales but played for England) and both Maurice Parry and Ben Woodburn (born in England but played for Wales) don't qualify.

We've also decided only those who have made 10 appearances for Liverpool qualify for such an esteemed team – playing in an old-school 3-2-5 formation – so it's bad news for Owen Beck, Danny Ward, Harry Wilson and Layton 'one game one goal' Maxwell while even 38 goals in 63 matches wasn't enough for Tony Rowley...

CRAIG BELLAMY

LEFT-WING 2006-2007, 2011-2012;
LFC apps 79; Wales caps 78

Described by John Toshack as "the nearest thing to Kevin Keegan I have seen in 20 years," Cardiff-born Craig was versatile, quick and a good finisher, yet forthright and controversial – the archetypal player you love to have on your team but hate to play against.

A boyhood Red, he had two spells at Anfield, 2006/07 under Rafa Benitez and 2011/12 under Kenny Dalglish, and the Redmen reached three cup finals over those two campaigns, winning the 2012 League Cup against his hometown club Cardiff City after Bellamy's goal against Manchester City sent Liverpool to Wembley.

He scored 18 goals and contributed 13 assists for LFC in 79 games and netted 19 goals in 78 appearances for Wales, captaining his country between 2007 and 2010.

CYRIL SIDLOW

GOALKEEPER 1946-1952; LFC apps 165; Wales caps 7

Colwyn Bay-born goalkeeper Cyril had a remarkable first season at Liverpool in 1946/47 when he won the league title against the club that had released him on a free transfer.

Sidlow had played for Wolves during World War II but when league football resumed he was no longer wanted by the men in Old Gold and joined the Reds who, in a Netflix-style twist, won the First Division title at Molineux in their final game with Cyril in goal.

He was still living in Wolverhampton next door to ex-team-mate Bert Williams. "After I had received my League champions medal, I took it round to Bert to show him," he recalled. "I don't know whether he appreciated that very much!"

Capped seven times by Wales, Sidlow kept 54 clean-sheets for LFC.



RAY LAMBERT

RIGHT-BACK 1946-1956; LFC apps 342; Wales caps 5

Versatile full-back Ray became the youngest-ever amateur to sign for a league club when he joined Liverpool aged 13 in 1936, but the war meant the lad from Bagilt in Flintshire had to wait a decade to make his debut and worked as a member of the Anfield ground-staff in the meantime.

A Kop favourite, he was a title-winner with the Reds in 1946/47 and played in Liverpool's first Wembley FA Cup final in 1950, but was also part of the side relegated to Division Two in 1954.

Ray retired to run a newsagents in Deeside in 1956 and passed away in 2009 with his five Wales caps and first LFC contract among memorabilia auctioned off for over £3,600 in 2019.





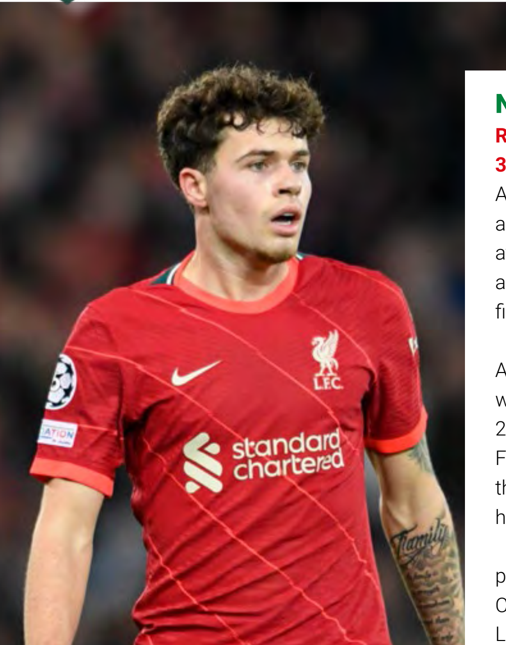
ERNEST PEAKE

CENTRE-BACK 1908-1914; LFC apps 55; Wales caps 11

Centre-half Ernest had already won the first of his 11 international caps for Wales when the Redmen signed the teenager from Aberystwyth Town in May 1908. "In Mid-Wales there is no centre-half to compare with him," reported the *Evening Express*.

Peake was a squad player for four seasons, making just 20 appearances until becoming first-choice in 1912/13 when he scored three times in 30 games.

He moved on from Liverpool to Scotland in 1914 to play for Third Lanark, but his career was interrupted by World War I. Ernest spent the 1918/19 campaign as player-manager of Blyth Spartans and took on a similar role back in Wales with Aberaman, but sadly died in November 1931 aged just 43.



NECO WILLIAMS

RIGHT-WING 2019-present; LFC apps 33; Wales caps 17

Already capped 17 times by Wales at the age of 20, he represented his country at Euro 2020 and is two play-off games away from helping the Dragons reach a first World Cup since 1958.

A product of the Liverpool FC Academy, the Wrexham-born full-back won an FA Youth Cup with the Reds in 2019 followed by the Premier League and FIFA Club World Cup in 2020, making him the only Welsh player to win both of those honours with LFC.

Having started out as a winger and played as a right-sided forward in the Carabao Cup quarter-final against Leicester, Neco, on loan with Fulham, joins our Liverpool Welsh XI on the right wing with some shrewd observers touting him to play further forward on a more regular basis as his career develops.

Words: Chris McLoughlin

JOEY JONES

LEFT-BACK 1975-1978; LFC apps 100; Wales caps 72

Born in Bangor to a Scouse Ma, tough-tackling left-back Joey Jones was a charismatic character loved by Kopites after being signed from Wrexham in 1975, but he initially struggled with the step-up to First Division football.

After taking a year to adapt, he was first-choice in 1976/77 for a Liverpool team which won the title and, for the first time, the European Cup in Rome where Joey was the subject of the travelling Kop's most famous banner: 'JOEY ATE THE FROGS LEGS, MADE THE SWISS ROLL, NOW HE'S MUNCHING GLADBACH'.

Jones added the UEFA Super Cup to his collection in 1977/78 but was ruthlessly dropped by Paisley after a 4-2 FA Cup defeat at Chelsea on his 100th appearance in January 1978 and returned to Wrexham that summer for a club-record fee of £210,000 that was only broken in January 2022.



JOE ALLEN

CENTRAL MIDFIELDER 2012-2016; LFC apps 132; Wales caps 68

At Swansea City from the age of nine to 22, Carmarthen-born Joe followed manager Brendan Rodgers to Anfield in 2012, a summer when he was also one of five Welshmen (Craig Bellamy was another) to play for Team GB in the London Olympics.

Rodgers dubbed Allen 'the Welsh Xavi' in the fly-on-the-wall documentary *Being Liverpool* and the ball-playing midfielder, Welsh footballer of the year in 2012, turned in some excellent displays in his 132 games for the Reds. Joe moved to Stoke in 2016, for whom he's played over 200 times, and he remains an integral part of the Cymru national team.

GEORGE LATHAM

CENTRAL MIDFIELDER 1903-1909; LFC apps 19; Wales caps 10

Anfield's famous Spion Kop was named after the South African hilltop where a battle took place in January 1900, but did you know that former Liverpool and Wales midfielder George Latham fought in the Second Boer War in 1901, two years before he signed for LFC?

Newtown-born Latham captained his hometown club and returned there after serving before signing for Liverpool, winning a league title in 1905/06 and earning



10 caps for Wales – the latest in 1913 when he was training the team after retiring but had to play against Ireland due to a player shortage!

George also trained the Great Britain Summer Olympics team in 1920, became Cardiff City's oldest debutant aged 41 in 1922 when on the coaching staff and coached the Bluebirds to their historic 1927 FA Cup final win against Arsenal.

Newtowns' Latham Park ground was named after him in 1951.

DEAN SAUNDERS

FORWARD 1991-1992;
LFC apps 61; Wales caps 75

The son of former Liverpool half-back Roy Saunders, Swansea-born Dean arrived at Anfield from Derby County for a club-record £2.9 million in 1991, but the Reds' patient passing style of play didn't suit a striker who thrived off quick balls forward on the counter-attack.

Saunders won the FA Cup and scored 23 goals in his first season at Liverpool, but nine of them were against Kuusysi Lahti and Swarovski Tirol in the UEFA Cup and after just one strike in the opening six games of season 1992/93 he was sold to Aston Villa.

With 22 goals in 75 appearances, Deano is Wales fifth all-time leading goalscorer and he was Welsh assistant-manager to John Toshack before managing Wrexham, Doncaster Rovers, Wolves, Crawley Town and Chesterfield.

IAN RUSH

FORWARD 1980-1987, 1988-1996;
LFC apps 660; Wales caps 73

Liverpool FC's greatest-ever goalscorer with 346 goals, Ian was also Wales' leading marksman with 28 goals until Gareth Bale broke his record in 2018…and our hearts in Kiev.

Rushie was born in St Asaph, brought up in Flint and joined the Reds from Chester City in 1980, leaving for Juventus in 1987 after scoring 207 goals and returning to Anfield in 1988 to add another 139 goals to his tally.

He won 14 major honours as a Liverpool player, numerous individual honours including the European Golden Boot in 1984, holds all kinds of club records including most goals against Everton (25!) and only three of his 346 goals were penalties. Quite simply, Rushie is Liverpool's greatest Welsh player of all time.

JOHN TOSHACK (player-manager)

FORWARD 1970-1978; LFC apps 247; Wales caps 40

At most other clubs John's 96 goals, 54 assists and seven pieces of major silverware in 247 games would give him a chance of being the club's greatest player, yet at Liverpool he wasn't even the best striker in the team.

Signed from hometown club Cardiff City for a record £110,000 in 1971, Tosh was fearsome in the air and became the foil for Kevin Keegan in a telepathic strike-partnership which fired the Reds to glory with Kopites re-wording the Welsh anthem Men of Harlech in Toshack's honour.

Capped 40 times by Wales, John missed the 1977 European Cup final through injury and joined Swansea City as player manager in 1978, eventually going on to manage Real Madrid (twice), Real Sociedad (twice) and Wales (twice) among others.

With Liverpool never having been managed by a Welshman, we're also making Toshack our Reds Welsh XI player-manager 31 years after the bookies installed both him and Graeme Souness as 6/1 shots to be the next Reds boss after Sir Kenny Dalglish resigned in 1991.


MONSTER
ENERGY


YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE
LIVERPOOL
FOOTBALL CLUB
EST·1892


GO
NIKE
standard chartered



DIO
OAL

Words: William Hughes

Diogo Jota double-fired Liverpool into the Carabao Cup final at Wembley and now he's desperate to see the side rewarded with an early piece of silverware this season

Diogo Jota was Liverpool's semi-final hero and now wants to help fire the Reds to success in the Carabao Cup. The Portuguese international has been in fabulous form for the Reds this season with his double at the Emirates taking his tally for the current campaign to 14.

His decisive second not only sealed Liverpool's place at Wembley but also took his goalscoring total past the 13 he achieved in 2020/21 during his debut season with the club.

That goal, a brilliantly taken 79th-minute effort from Trent Alexander-Arnold's perfect throughball, drew comparisons with the finishing of Robbie Fowler and Luis Suarez among some supporters on social media.

However, Jota had an anxious wait to see if the goal would be awarded after it was initially ruled-out for offside by the on-field officials. Fortunately a VAR check overturned that verdict and gave the Reds an important two-goal cushion in North London.

"It meant a lot because two-nil was a great position as the game was coming to the end," he says. "So two-nil was perfect for us. I was not expecting the linesman to give offside. I was surprised because I really thought I was on and luckily I was."

The first leg at Anfield had ended in a goalless stalemate with the Reds unable to capitalise after Arsenal midfielder Granit Xhaka was dismissed after only 24 minutes for a high challenge on Jota.

But the no20 quietened the Gunners' fans at the Emirates when he opened the scoring with a fine effort. Receiving another pass from Trent on the left, he attacked right-back Takehiro Tomiyasu and

Diogo Jota is on fire. We were completely convinced when he arrived at the club he would help us massively. Since he is here he has turned into a really world-class striker. Mentality mixed with quality is the reason we signed him. He is incredibly important to us, that mix of his skills is really exciting

gained himself a yard before finding another to cut across centre-back Ben White and covering left-back Kieran Tierney.

Diogo then found an angle to beat goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale, even though he did not make the cleanest of contact with his strike.

"I wanted to go in that corner but obviously my intention was to hit it stronger and more in the corner. Sometimes you hit it badly and you miss, but fortunately for me and for the team on this occasion the ball went in.

"Of course you always think about scoring goals in important games.

It was a great feeling, especially when the first leg wasn't really good for us and we know we could have done better that night. So we came to Arsenal to do the job to go to Wembley and to go to the final. And happily for me and for the team, we were able to do that."

The semi-final clashes saw the Reds unable to call upon the services of attackers Mo Salah and Sadio Mane who were both on international duty at AFCON. But while many pundits felt that meant Jota was the Reds' go-to guy for goals, the man himself highlighted the contribution of the whole team.

"Obviously Mo and Sadio are two great players but I don't think they ever played a minute in this competition this season, so it is what it is.

"We need to count on whoever is in our dressing-room here at any time. Of course we missed them but if they're not here, we cannot think about that."

Jota has been a key figure along the road to Wembley. In the quarter-final against Leicester City at Anfield just before Christmas, the Reds seemed set to exit the tournament when they went in at half-time 3-1 down.

Jürgen Klopp introduced the forward from the bench in place of youngster Conor Bradley at half-time and Jota's clever finish in front of the Kop midway through the second half helped restore belief inside the stadium. Backed by a raucous crowd, the Reds drew level through Takumi Minamino deep into added-time.

That sent the game to penalties and after the two teams both scored four of their initial five attempts, the shoot-out went to sudden death. Foxes defender Ryan Bertrand was then denied by Caoimhin Kelleher and Jota stepped forward to take Liverpool's sixth spot kick.

He kept his nerve to beat Kasper Schmeichel from 12 yards and spark scenes of jubilation inside Anfield.

Jota is loving his football and believes his numbers – 27 goals from 58 appearances for Liverpool heading into February – are a reflection of the greater amount of chances coming his way in a red shirt.




DIOGO J.
20

His numbers speak for themselves. We know from training that he runs a lot, fights for the ball and his finishing on both left and right foot is great, and his heading is incredible as well

"I think here obviously I get a lot more. I can miss some but I can also score some and that's great. That's always what I try to do: create chances and score goals for the team, and I'm just enjoying it."

After Liverpool's semi-final success, Klopp was quick to highlight the contribution of the man nicknamed 'Jota the Slotter' by ex-Reds defender Jamie Carragher in recognition of his eye for goal.

"The mood in the dressing-room is over the moon – difficult game, difficult time, but the boys were exceptional," said the manager after the club had made competition history by reaching final no13.

"Diogo Jota on fire. We were completely convinced when he arrived at the club he would help us massively. Since he is here he has made another step, he has turned into a really world-class striker.

"Mentality mixed with quality is the reason we signed him. Of course he scored two goals. He is incredibly important to us, so it is that mix of his skills that is really exciting. He is in good shape as well and long may it continue."

His excellent form has also been rewarded by a song! During the game at the Emirates and the league outing at Crystal Palace which followed, the travelling Kop hailed their hero with the tune…

'Oh, he wears the number 20, he will take us to victory, And when he's running down the left-wing, he'll cut inside and score for LFC, He's a lad from Portugal, better than Figo don't you know, Oh, his name is Diogo!'

His team-mates have been impressed with his contribution from day one. After the win against the Gunners, centre-back Virgil van Dijk said: "He is a fantastic player and his numbers speak for themselves. He's very important and has shown over the last year-and-a-half or so that he is a difficult striker or winger to play against.

"We know from training that he runs a lot, fights for the ball and his finishing on both left and right foot is great, and his heading is incredible as well.

"He stepped up again tonight and he was very important for us. He took his second goal fantastically well. It was a great ball from Trent again and it was a great goal."

Jota's ability to play across the forward-line has made him an important asset for Klopp and he says that working with the coaching staff and his fellow forwards has helped expand his game.

Speaking to the club's official matchday programme last month, he said: "I always try to do what the manager asks me to do. At Wolves we sometimes played with three upfront and I was on the left, because we had a proper main striker in Raul [Jimenez]. When we played with two, I was upfront. So it depends on what the manager asks me to do.

"I try to adapt and that's one of my main characteristics. I don't force anyone to adapt to me – I try to adapt to whatever is required and do my best.

"Maybe some people will say I'm not a proper false nine or I'm not a nine, whereas some others may like it. But whenever I'm on the pitch I aim to get goals and get the team reaching the opponent's goal.

"Now I'm playing most of the time as a centre-forward and so I get crosses into the box. I'm getting those chances and I'm trying to convert them.

"When I was a kid I tried to develop every part of my game: left foot, right foot, heading. I tried to be good at everything because I know that sometimes I might have a chance in the air, so I need to be good at it."

Now Jota is targeting silverware when the Reds take on Thomas Tuchel's Chelsea at Wembley. The 25-year-old will be hoping to be on the winning side after tasting defeat on his last appearance at the historic venue.

He was in the Wolves side that were beaten 3-2 after extra-time by Watford in a thrilling FA Cup semi-final back in 2019, a day on which he supplied the assist for the opening goal of the game, scored by full-back Matt Doherty.

"It will be very special," he says. "This time there is a trophy to play for – so let's go for it."





KELLEHER *ON* KEEPING

The Reds keeper was praised highly for his performance in the Carabao Cup semi-final, and here he talks us through the finer parts of his craft



SHOT-STOPPING

"At an early age you're taught techniques such as how to dive and mostly now it's more the small details I work on. If a shot does come in, can I make the decision to either catch it or parry it? If you are going to parry, you have to get it into areas which are safe and away from attackers so that if they're running in they can't tap it in – so you have to keep it away from those areas. It's stuff like that.

"When I was growing up, Manuel Neuer was the one I used to watch. I enjoyed the way he played. In the Premier League now nearly every goalkeeper is a good shot-stopper, to be honest. I don't think there is one who stands out because they are all amazing keepers.

HANDLING THE BALL

"Again, I think you are taught the technique from an early age of how to catch the ball and so on. Nowadays it's quite difficult when you see the way players are striking the ball and the way it moves and swerves.

"I think it's important that if the ball is there to be caught, you catch it and take the pressure off the defence and give your team a break. That's vital, but again the decision you have to make is if you can catch it or if you need to parry it."

REFLEXES AND REACTIONS

"I don't know if you do develop these or if you're just born with them, where you just naturally have quick reactions. But you can certainly work on it in training.

"Some drills are centred around reactions with balls which are close to you, but good reactions are something I've had ever since I was at a young age as well, so it's a bit of both natural instinct and training.

"You can do certain drills to develop them too. We have some where maybe John Achterberg [goalkeeping coach] will be close to you and we're facing away from him and then he'll shout you and, as you turn, he strikes the ball. That's to work on your reaction time. Drills like that help as you're getting less reaction time than you normally would in a game."





SPOT-KICKS

"I used to like watching penalty shoot-outs when I was a kid, they're exciting. I can remember watching Iker Casillas making a few penalty saves for Spain.

"To be fair, I do a lot of training with the penalty-takers here so that helps me try and pick up techniques and the way players are striking it and so on. So it's stuff like that and working with Jack [Robinson, goalkeeping coach] and John on the analysis side as well.

"I wouldn't say I get nervous when it comes to a shoot-out. It's more exciting really that I have a chance to make a save. If I don't, there's no pressure on me. All the pressure's on the attacker as they are 12 yards out and they probably should score. I try to relish it and have confidence I can make a save.

"It's hard to describe the feeling when you have saved a penalty, especially in a shoot-out as there's a lot happening and in that second I don't really know what's going on! But honestly the overall feeling is just one of being happy and joyful if I do save it, especially at Anfield when you hear the crowd."

DISTRIBUTION

"I'd say I'm quite good with the ball at my feet and playing from the back with the defenders. I played outfield for a lot of my young career which helped me develop the technique to be comfortable with the ball at my feet and being used to having it there. That really helped me with being calm with the ball and being able to play with the defenders."



PSYCHOLOGY

"Having the right mindset and mentality is probably the most important attribute for a goalkeeper. There's a lot of pressure on that one position and, if you do make a mistake, then more than likely it will be a goal.

"First-and-foremost if you do want to become a goalkeeper, you have to be comfortable with that and be ready for that. So I developed that side of the game so that I enjoyed the pressures. While I know it's about the team more than the individual, I do relish that kind of role.

"Before games I just go about my normal routine. I like to stay quite calm and be relaxed and ready for the match. I don't like to get too psyched-up. I just like to be calm and then do the normal stuff that I do every day in training."

TRAINING DAYS

"I just love the goalkeeper training. I love being a goalkeeper. I am excited every day to come into training. We're all quite close as a goalkeeper group. We have a lot of fun in our sessions as well as working hard."

GOALKEEPING COACHES

"John Achterberg has always been really good with me, ever since I came over from Ireland and was coming up as an academy boy. He's always helping me work hard, told me the right things and been honest with me.

"He's helped me improve a lot and worked on my game along with Jack [Robinson]. I feel that I have improved so much and a lot of it is down to them.

"We've recently been joined by Claudio Taffarel who is obviously a goalkeeping legend. I wasn't born at the time of the 1994 World Cup but still, as a goalkeeper, you know the name. So when we knew he was coming, there was a lot of excitement. He's been really good as well. Obviously we're trying to get a different point-of-view from John as well, so it's good to have two kinds of coaches.

"Claudio might take a session and it would be different to what John might do. It's different opinions and ways of operating but no one way is the right way, so they can only make us all better."

THE MAIN MAN

"Working with Alisson is really good. He's one of the best there is, so just to train with him every day helps to bring my own levels and standards up a bit. I'm always watching him and trying to learn from him and trying to do things which he does in training.

"I watch the saves he makes and the techniques he uses and then just how calm he is in all situations. Then I try to replicate that when I'm training and playing.

"If there's a game I've played in, we might speak about it. There may be certain situations too that I may ask him about and he'll give me his thoughts about how I dealt with those things. He just helps me and if I do ever need to speak to him about anything, I know he'll always be there.

"His positioning is very good. The thing with him is that he makes saves look very easy that maybe other goalkeepers would make look difficult. Because of his positioning, he makes it look easy, when it's actually a great save.

"His handling is also very good – the way he catches balls that maybe other goalkeepers would parry away. So things like that are really helpful to observe and try to learn from.

"As I say, when you train with people like him every day it improves your own levels and your own standards. I've been here three years now working with him and that's really helped me improve a lot."

WEMBLEY WONDER

Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp has suggested that Caoimhin will start the Carabao Cup final against Chelsea. The Republic of Ireland man has played in three of the matches on the road to Wembley and impressed in keeping a clean-sheet in the semi-final second leg win against Arsenal.

The day after the win, Klopp told the media: "My idea in this moment is to play him. I don't see any reason why we should not do that. Caoimhin deserves that. He brought the team there.

"Last week [in the first leg] against Arsenal I had to explain to Caoimhin why he was not playing. I usually do not do that, but it was his competition and I thought Ali needed the game because he was lacking rhythm after COVID and all these kinds of things.

"What I really liked was that Caoimhin was not like, 'Oh yes, I understand'. He was like, 'What? Why?' So he matures in all departments and that is good. That is the goalie we want.

"As a football manager you have to consider a lot of things. We consider Caoimhin as an outstanding goalie. Not a good goalie – an outstanding goalie. And we want to keep him here.

"It's all about performing of course. If he wouldn't have performed on the level he performed when he played, I would maybe see it differently. But he shows that he deserves all the trust and faith we have in him. That's the situation.

"I said before this is really the John Achterberg project. I have to say it because not all the people in the club thought, 'Oh yes, CK will be the next goalkeeper'. There was one person: John Achterberg.

"So now we have the best in the world and a really, really good one. That is a good situation."

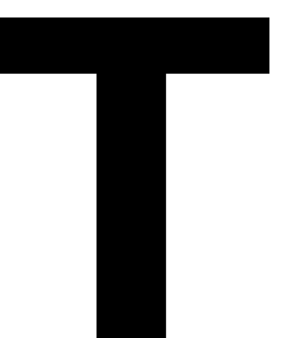



M.SALAH
10
MANÉ
10
EGYPT
FSF

STARS OF THE SHOW

Liverpool's offensive talismans dominated the Africa Cup of Nations headlines with Naby Keita playing his part too

Words: Chris McLoughlin

**hey are friends and team-mates at Liverpool, but when Sadio Mane and Mo Salah went head-to-head in the Africa Cup of Nations final for Senegal and Egypt there could only be one winner.**

For Mane it was glory, for Salah it was despair. For Liverpool supporters watching, it was strangely tense even though we had a guaranteed winner.

Senegal went to the delayed AFCON 2021 in Cameroon as favourites, despite having never won the tournament before. With Chelsea's Edouard Mendy in goal, Napoli's Kalidou Koulibaly at the back, PSG's Idrissa Gueye in midfield and Mane upfront, the spine of the team looked strong.

But with expectation comes pressure and it took a 97th-minute Mane penalty to give Senegal a 1-0 win in their opening match against Zimbabwe. A 0-0 draw against Guinea followed in a clash that saw Naby Keita booked for a foul on Mane as the two Liverpool pals went head-to-head in Bafoussam.

The Lions of Teranga also drew their final group match 0-0 against Malawi, but it was enough to top the group with Guinea also qualifying despite a 2-1 defeat to Zimbabwe in which Keita scored a belter.

Mane had predicted in an Instagram video before the tournament that Senegal would play Egypt or Guinea in the final, but it was the end of the road in the last 16 for Naby lad as Guinea lost 1-0 to Gambia.

Tragically the last 16 saw eight people lose their lives, and many others injured, when a temporary barrier collapsed outside the Olembe Stadium in Yaounde before hosts Cameroon beat Comoros 2-1.

Senegal defeated Cape Verde 2-0 in their last-16 match, but 16 minutes before he opened the scoring Mane suffered a sickening clash of heads with Cape Verde goalkeeper Vozinha, who was sent off for the incident.







"MO OPENED THE SCORING WITH A CLOSE-RANGE FINISH AGAINST MOROCCO IN THE QUARTERS AND, WHEN THE GAME WENT TO EXTRA-TIME, IT WAS FROM HIS RUN AND CROSS THAT TREZEGUET NETTED THE WINNER"

Liverpool's no10 collapsed to the ground after scoring and was taken to hospital, but was given the all-clear to play in the quarter-final in which Senegal beat Equatorial Guinea 3-1.

It set up a semi-final against Burkina Faso and after creating a goal for Bamba Dieng, our man clipped home an 87th-minute shot to secure a 3-1 success and send Senegal to the final.

"It shows you the momentum we have," said Sadio. "We knew it was not going to be at all easy to get to two straight AFCON finals, but most important for us now is to go all the way and win it."

Egypt lost their opening game 1-0 to Nigeria, but a Salah volley ensured a 1-0 win against Guinea-Bissau and the Pharaohs finished second in their group after also beating Sudan 1-0.

After a goalless draw against Ivory Coast in the last 16, skipper Salah won the toss and chose for his side to take their spot-kicks second. Manchester United's Eric Bailly had his penalty saved and Salah stepped up to convert Egypt's fifth to send them through.

Mo opened the scoring with a close-range finish against Morocco in the quarters and, when the game went to extra-time, it was from his run and cross that Aston Villa's Trezeguet netted the winner.

With both Egypt and Senegal playing their quarter-finals in the Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium on the same day, Salah and Mane bumped into each other in the tunnel area between games and had a photo taken together that was shared by Kopites on social media.

Cameroon awaited in the semi-final and after another 0-0 draw it also went to penalties, but this time Egypt had the game won before Salah took his penalty as the hosts missed three of their opening four spot-kicks.

So the stage was set for Senegal v Egypt – Sadio v Mo – in the final in Yaounde. Before kick-off the Liverpool pair embraced in the tunnel but then put friendship aside for 120 minutes.

When Senegal were awarded an early penalty it appeared that Salah was telling Egypt goalkeeper Gabaski







– who had already saved four penalties – which way his Liverpool team-mate was most likely to shoot from the spot. Mane broke the conversation up, telling Gabaski to get back on his line, but when he blasted his spot-kick straight down the middle the Egyptian goalie palmed the ball away.

At the other end, Salah twice forced saves from Mendy, but after 120 minutes it finished goalwards and went to penalties. Just as he had done previously, Salah opted for Egypt to take second – but on this occasion it didn't work out.

With four penalties taken apiece Senegal led 3-2 and Mane, who had spent the shoot-out nervously pacing up and down behind his team-mates, was next up.

As tests of nerve go, having the spot-kick to win your nation a first AFCON title – after already missing one – doesn't come much bigger, but Mane was up to the task. He fired his penalty hard and low to Gabaski's right and after a 60-year wait, Senegal were champions of Africa.

Back in the Senegalese capital of Dakar, street parties were breaking out and the official fan-zone was bouncing, but the ever-humble Mane's thoughts were with his mate. He went to find a tearful Salah, threw his arm around him and whispered some consoling words into his ear. It was a touching moment.

Mane, named man-of-the-match in four of Senegal's previous six games, was then named as 'Man of the Tournament' and after collecting his award he exchanged a high-five with Salah as Egypt trudged up to collect their runners-up medals.

Senegal captain Koulibaly then, rather strangely, had to climb steps into the stand with FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who was clutching the trophy, to be presented with it by Cameroon president Paul Biya before returning to the on-pitch podium to lift it with his team-mates.

As Koulibaly raised the trophy, Mane wasn't visible. Instead of being



at the front to get on all the photos, he was at the back of the podium sharing a hug and a chat with manager Aliou Cisse who, in 2002, missed the decisive penalty when Senegal were beaten in the AFCON final by Cameroon.

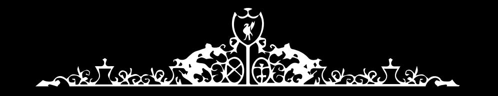
And when the Senegal players took the trophy down to their fans, Sadio and team-mate Gueye, wearing Champions D'Afrique t-shirts, instead chilled out. They sat on the turf in their medals, leaning against a hoarding with the word 'CHAMPIONS' upon it, taking in the enormity of what they had just achieved.

The following morning, Mane was pictured in his hotel bed cuddling up to the gold-plated Africa Cup of Nations trophy with his winner's medal hanging around his neck.

AFCON 2021 will forever be a tournament that, for contrasting reasons, Sadio Mane and Mo Salah never forget, but next time they share a football pitch with a trophy at stake things will be different.

They'll be wearing Liverpool shirts and this time they'll try to win it together.





"A remarkable and loyal servant to the Reds"

A tribute to Peter Robinson, who was club secretary and chief executive for many years, from former Liverpool Echo sports editor, Ken Rogers

A football club's journey on the road to the very top requires many things. The passion and inspiration of a Bill Shankly whose sole goal in life was to make the people happy. The modesty and natural football brain of the supremely successful Bob Paisley.

That Joe Fagan trait of knowing when to put an arm around somebody and when to give them that steely stare that never required any follow-up words.

The ability of a Kenny Dalglish to understand all of these things and seamlessly take that giant step from dressing-room to hot-seat with such five-star quality.

When it mattered most, the Reds relied heavily on someone 'upstairs' who was acknowledged by his peers as one of the game's greatest administrators, Peter Robinson, who has died aged 85.



I worked closely with the former Liverpool chief executive across 33 of the 35 eventful years he served Liverpool (1965 to 2000). Every manager Peter worked with respected and valued his experience, sage advice and calm demeanour.

All of these qualities were particularly crucial in the eighties linked with the dark shadow of Heysel in 1985 and the heart-rending tragedy that was Hillsborough in 1989.

It was Peter who immediately opened up Anfield to the public after the Sheffield disaster, understanding that family members, fans and Merseysiders in general needed a symbolic place of quiet and calm in which to mourn and reflect.

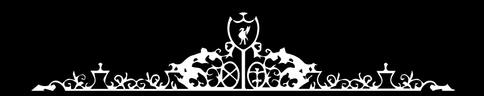
The tens of thousands that subsequently walked the terraces day after day, watching the pitch disappear under a sea of floral tributes, benefited from a togetherness that united our football city and inspired the call for an immediate revolution around crowd safety.

Peter Robinson had seen stadium development at Anfield stifled at times, surrounded as it was by its Victorian terraced streets. He looked long and hard at suggestions for a shared Liverpool/Everton stadium vision for Stanley Park, but understood the importance both clubs placed on retaining separate football cathedrals.

Plans to rebuild and expand the Kemlyn Road Stand had seen the club steadily buy up houses on Kemlyn Road during the 1970s and 1980s. Clearly, supreme patience was another Robinson quality as two sisters, Joan and Nora Mason, famously refused to sell their little house.







Normally only bosses and players deserve a place in the Liverpool FC Hall of Fame. Peter Robinson is a rare exception

Agreement was finally reached in 1990, the impressive new Centenary Stand opening on 2 September 1992 before the Kop became all-seater in 1994.

Peter was a key contact for local and national sports journalists down the decades. Shankly, with his bubbling confidence, had been comfortable dealing with the media, but the likes of Bob and Joe were less enthusiastic.

Local and national reporters relied heavily on Peter to formally confirm or deny speculative stories. He had a surprisingly small staff at Anfield and nothing happened without his knowledge.

I personally recall some historic interaction with him on Friday 22 February 1991, stemming initially from a simple information call that was picked up by an *Echo* sports-desk colleague. The Liverpool chief exec had forcibly said that under no circumstances should we miss a scheduled late-morning Anfield press-conference.



He refused to expand on it, but I quickly phoned Peter back and the trust we had built up down those decades came into play. I promised that no matter what the news was, we would not go to press until after the meeting had started. I added that no one would be told apart from a limited number of my staff and the *Echo* editor himself.

The line went quiet for what seemed like an age before Peter revealed that Kenny Dalglish had made the shock decision to quit as manager. Kenny had been super successful, but his sky- high standards meant he was beginning to question some of his own decisions. He had been clearly affected by Hillsborough after giving everything, with his wife Marina, to the families of the 97.

We subsequently set up the presses with a completely separate front-page lead story that was never going to see the light of day. I wrote the Dalglish news story and immediately drove up to Anfield where I stood at the back of a packed media gathering in the Main Stand Trophy Room. There were no mobile phones in those days.

As an ashen-faced Kenny walked in, his mind made up, Peter looked across at me and nodded to confirm and I rushed to a call-box on the adjacent landing, phoning the office and shouting: “Go!”

Peter Robinson was all-powerful at Anfield. He always had his finger on the pulse of what was important to the club and proved a remarkable and loyal servant to the Reds as history unfolded around him under seven managers.

It’s normally only bosses and players who deserve a place in the Liverpool FC Hall of Fame.

Peter is one of those rare exceptions to the rule.



AMERICAN DREAM

Former Reds double title-winning captain Gemma Bonner is enjoying a new challenge in Kentucky with Racing Louisville but still keeps tabs on her beloved LFC

Interview: William Hughes
Racing Louisville action pics: Connor Cunningham

During six years in a Liverpool FC Women's shirt, Gemma Bonner achieved legendary status in her time with the Reds. The centre-back was immediately appointed captain by manager Matt Beard after arriving from Chelsea ahead of the 2013 season despite being just 21 years old at the time.

Gemma repaid his faith by leading the club to back-to-back Women's Super League titles in 2013 and 2014 and she became the first player of the professional era to play 100 games for Liverpool FC Women.

After leaving for Manchester City in 2018, her career took an unexpected twist last April when she moved to America to link up with National Women's Soccer League expansion team Racing Louisville.

Earlier this month she flew back to the United States to begin pre-season and we caught up with her before her return.

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THE FOOTBALL IN THE USA COMPARED TO ENGLAND?

It is very different but I've really enjoyed it, probably a bit more than I expected to, to be honest. It's a different experience and a different culture but I'm enjoying it and I feel like I'm in a good place out there.

There seems to have been a positive response to me so far. The pre-season out there is a lot shorter than I'm used to – about six weeks – so I was looking forward to it and hopefully I can have a good year now.

YOU'RE COMING UP AGAINST SOME OF THE BEST PLAYERS IN THE WORLD ON A WEEKLY BASIS...

That was probably one of the biggest reasons I wanted to go to America – to challenge myself. I'd played in England for over ten years, won everything, and although you probably don't realise it at the time because you get into a bit of a routine, I think you can get a bit comfortable and I guess I was ready for a new challenge.

Playing against the best players week in, week out is a great test. You're also playing against US World Cup-winners and it's very different in terms of how the teams are put together with the draft system.

Every game is so competitive because the talent is so evenly

→



spread with the players across the league. You can't really afford to go into any game in a relaxed mindset because every single game is a challenge and they're exciting games to play in as well.

It's not as technical and tactical as England. I find that it's a much faster-paced game over there, purely because of the style of football which is a lot more transitional, but it's something that I've not necessarily experienced before.

I'm enjoying the challenge so far and I'm just trying to embrace it as much as I can.

HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THE SET-UP AT LOUISVILLE AS AN 'EXPANSION TEAM' IN THE LEAGUE?

It has been new for everyone but the set-up they've got is brilliant. They've got a brand new training-ground, a brand new stadium and we've got such a great small-knit community in terms of both the women's side and the men's side.

I've been really impressed in terms of what they said. They've delivered, which I think is often hard to find in women's football. Unfortunately you can't say that for every team in the league. There's such a disparity over there with the facilities from club to club but I suppose it's like that in most leagues. But for myself and Louisville, I'm more than happy and the facilities we've got there are excellent.

Obviously I've been used to having good facilities in my career, so for me that wasn't necessarily a deciding factor. But the fact that they have them just shows their intentions of what they want to be, having the women's team and coming in as an expansion team they want to be successful and they want to be winning.

For the chance to be a part of it from the start was something that really excited me and I'm hoping to have a successful few years there.

YOU ALSO HAVE A FAMILIAR FACE WITH YOU IN YOUR EX-MANCHESTER CITY TEAM-MATE AND DENMARK INTERNATIONAL NADIA NADIM…

To be completely honest, when I signed I didn't know any other player that was signing and I didn't know any player in the team. But what I saw was the vision and structure of the club, what they had in place for me as a player and where it was going to challenge me and progress me. That was probably my biggest decision.

I'd played in England for a long time and so if I was going to make a complete change so quickly – because it came about so unexpectedly – it was something that I had to be really willing to do. I've obviously left my family to move to the other side of the world, so it was something that had to excite me and I had to make the decision for me.

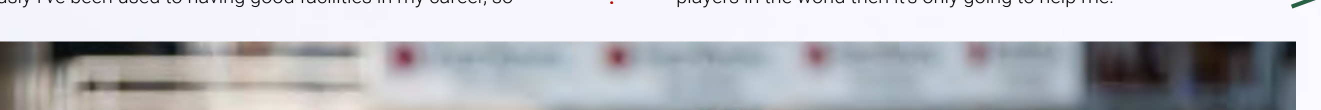
But having Nadia there was a bonus. She arrived a little bit after me so, yes, she's a fantastic player but an unbelievable person too and she's such a value to the team in terms of what she brings both on and off the pitch.

Her experiences speak for themselves and to have her and be reunited on the same team, I was super happy – but I can't say that I actually knew that she was going to sign when I agreed!

HOPEFULLY YOUR PERFORMANCES WILL COME TO THE ATTENTION OF ENGLAND MANAGER SARINA WIEGMAN TOO…

Yes, I still want to be successful on the international stage. Moving to America was going to challenge me and push me out of my comfort-zone, and for me as a player that's what I've got to do. I've got to improve and give myself the best possible chance in terms of the environment to develop.

I want to get better every day and if I'm playing against the best players in the world then it's only going to help me.







YOU MANAGED TO GET A FEW MONTHS BACK IN ENGLAND EITHER SIDE OF CHRISTMAS WHICH MUST HAVE BEEN NICE…

I feel like I managed to have a good break and felt refreshed mentally and physically. It's probably the first time in however many years that I've actually been able to 'escape' from football for a bit, with coming home and spending time with family that obviously I'd not been able to do throughout the year.

I guess that's probably made me appreciate the time I had a little bit more. So from that point-of-view, it was great to come home for a few months. Louisville were really good in terms of giving us an off-season programme but they were also aware that people needed to be able to spend time with their family.

When we're in-season over there, it's so intense even just in terms of the travelling as we play all over America. The games are probably the easiest part in terms of having to travel from coast to coast and often changing time-zones every few days. So having that time at home has been a new experience but it's definitely one that I've really appreciated. It made me want to come back and make it worthwhile when I think about what I am missing at home.

YOU HAVE BEEN KEEPING TABS ON THE LIVERPOOL FC WOMEN'S TEAM AND MUST BE DELIGHTED TO SEE THEM DOING SO WELL…

It's so good to see. You can see that they're really high on confidence at the minute. They've got a great squad that Matt Beard and his staff have put together and I think you can really see that they've got the buzz back around the place and the results are a reflection of that.

I'm really hoping that we can see them make it through to the end of the season and get the promotion because Liverpool needs to be in the top league with being such a big club and the history of what the women's team have done previously.

It'd be great to see them back up there. I'm one of their biggest supporters so I'm hoping that come May they'll be celebrating.

YOU WERE ALSO BACK AT ANFIELD DURING YOUR CLOSE-SEASON BREAK AND DID SOME PUNDITRY FOR LFCTV…

Anfield was actually the first place I went to after coming home! I flew back that day and went to the Atletico Madrid game as I just love being around the club and Anfield is such a unique stadium with that atmosphere.

I think everyone's behind the team. Jürgen instills the kind of attitude and mentality in the club where the team will keep fighting. A lot of people have ruled them out of the title race but I think with this squad they will keep fighting until the end.

I went to as many games as I could while I was back and no matter who plays, the team is competitive. We've obviously seen a lot of the young players given their opportunities whether that be through the COVID situation or players on international duty as with AFCON recently.

You can see that everybody wants everyone to do well and that only raises the level of standard and performance within the team.

Going to Anfield is something I definitely miss now that I'm back in America but there is actually a small contingent of us who are all Liverpool fans and we always try and watch the games whenever we can.

We'll be cheering them on in the cup final and hopefully they can win that trophy and then push on from there.



THE **RACING LOUISVILLE** STORY

Racing Louisville FC is a National Women's Soccer League expansion club, meaning a new team in a sports league from a city that has not hosted a team in that league before.

It was formed with the intention of satisfying the demand for a local team and began playing last year at the 15,304-capacity Lynn Family Stadium. The team finished its inaugural season ninth out of the 10 teams.

Racing Louisville FC is so-named in reference to the city's horse-racing venues, including the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs. It also adopted the 'Racing' name as a nod to that adopted by many foreign football clubs.

"IT'S NEVER BORING WITH US"

Words: Chris McLoughlin

New year, new resolutions, new Liverpool manager? Well for one game only it was, as Jürgen Klopp began 2022 with a bout of COVID, meaning assistant Pep Lijnders stepped into the long coat and baseball cap for the trip to face Chelsea at Stamford Bridge.

Pep left the cap off and on the morning of the game in West London he discovered he'd have to leave Alisson, Joel Matip and Roberto Firmino out of his team too as they'd also received suspected positive results.

It wasn't going to make getting a PCR (positive Chelsea result) any easier, but one lad who could play to make his 200th Liverpool appearance was Trent Alexander-Arnold.

In the quest for silverware some achievements get overlooked, but playing 200 games for the Reds when you're only 23 is some feat and only three others – Michael Owen, Robbie Fowler and Phil Thompson – clocked up the double-century at a younger age.

Unfortunately the Reds couldn't mark the occasion by taking all three points, but what a game of football for the first Premier League crowd trialling safe-standing. Straight from kick-off, when Sadio Mane caught Cesar Azpilicueta with an arm more stray than a cat in an alley to earn surely the fastest booking in Liverpool history, it was edgy.

Edouard Mendy saved from Mo Salah, Caoimhin Kelleher pounced at the feet of Christian Pulisic, and Mane opened the scoring when Trevoh Chalobah made a pig's ear of an attempted clearance to allow the Senegal international captain to round the Senegal international goalie and net. Bet it gave them something to chat about on the flight to AFCON that night.

Trent then showed why he's already played 200 LFC games with a delightfully clipped pass to send Salah sprinting through against his former club. He feigned to cut inside, glided past Marcos Alonso like he was a cone on a training ground and sublimely beat Mendy at his near-post. World-class.

The relentless first-half tempo continued and Chelsea got it back to Desmond, as they call it dahn sarf, with two goals in four minutes. Mateo Kovacic smashed a volley in off the inside of the post and Pulisic lashed home the equaliser.

It felt at that point like they should wheel out Mark Hughes and Gianfranco Zola and have done with it, but the Reds almost won it after the break when Salah chipped Mendy from 30 yards, but the Chelsea keeper backpedalled just in time to turn the ball wide.

"It's never boring with us," said Lijnders at full-time. "We should have controlled the game better. This balance was





not right today, but again you can always do things better in a draw."

Spot on, Pep, but social media made depressing reading that night. With the gap to Man City now 11 points, some were not only writing the title off but spiralling into forecasts of a doom-filled future where Liverpool never win the league again until the end of time. And a happy new year to you too.

Off to make fresh starts were young defenders Tony Gallacher and Morgan Boyes, who joined St Johnstone and Livingston respectively, but the COVID situation at Liverpool was becoming untenable. Next to get it was Lijnders followed by an outbreak that forced the closure of the AXA Training Centre after consultation with the local health authority.

It meant that Liverpool were unable to field a team for the first leg of the Carabao Cup semi-final against Arsenal at the Emirates and successfully applied to have the fixture postponed, provoking some wild conspiracy theories which had a rather ironic twist in the plot when Arsenal later requested their Premier League game at Spurs be cancelled for similar reasons.

Thankfully the situation improved enough for the Reds to reopen the AXA after a three-day closure and cobble together a side for the FA Cup third-round tie at home to Shrewsbury Town, although Klopp didn't know if he'd be there to see it.

"I have to address this immediately," he wrote in the matchday programme. "This is one of the strangest programme columns I have ever written because I have no idea if I will be in the stadium with you, leading my team in person – or watching from home."

Peter Krawietz did the pre-match media duties and







revealed that head of fitness Andreas Kornmayer had given the players individual training programmes while the AXA was shut and that "this was a busy week somehow – even if we were sitting at home, the mobile phones were glowing." Maybe that's how everyone ended up playing Wordle?

A negative test result on the morning of the game meant that Klopp was back and Conor Bradley, Tyler Morton, Elijah Dixon-Bonner, Kaide Gordon and Max Woltman were all in his starting XI, while debutant Melkamu Frauendorf and James Norris both came on.

Understandably the Reds were disjointed for the opening half-hour and League One Shrewsbury looked like they could spring a shock when Daniel Udoh opened the scoring in the 27th minute, but it was the day when Gordon announced himself to Anfield.

Bradley chipped a pass to Gordon in the box and showing remarkable composure the teenager touched the ball away from a defender before slotting home with his left-foot like a veteran.

It was Gordon's first goal for the Reds and made him, at 17 years and 96 days old, Liverpool's youngest-ever FA Cup scorer and the second-youngest behind Ben Woodburn in all competitions.

And if it makes you feel any older, Kaide was born just two months before Steven Gerrard scored his 'Youuu beauty' goal against Olympiacos in the Champions League.

A Fabinho penalty on the stroke of half-time gave the Reds the lead, after which substitute Firmino did Firmino things by scoring with a back-heel. Fab then continued his bid to be Liverpool's leading January goalscorer by netting again to make it 4-1.

Into the hat for the fourth round went Liverpool and out they came with Cardiff City, who have a 100 per cent win record against the Reds in the FA Cup, albeit from two games played in 1928 and 1930. This time we'd play at Anfield at 12 noon on a Sunday live on ITV, a kick-off so early that Ben Shephard might referee with Susanna Reid and Kate Garraway running the lines.

While Klopp was dismissing rumours that a hip injury had ruled Thiago out for the season, Mane was getting Senegal's Africa Cup of Nations campaign off to a winning start with the only goal against Zimbabwe, but Salah's Egypt went down to Nigeria by the same scoreline.

Back on Merseyside, the first leg of the Carabao Cup quarter-final could finally be played with Anfield hosting and the second leg now switching to the Emirates. Twenty-four minutes in, the Gunners had Granit Xhaka sent off for denying Diogo Jota a goalscoring opportunity, but it turned out to be a false positive for the Reds.

Arsenal pulled the shutters down and although Liverpool had all of the ball they managed only one shot on target with the sight of Takumi Minamino blasting over late on symbolising a frustrating evening.

"We're all going to Wembley," sang the jubilant Arsenal fans in the lower Annie Road end.

Over at AFCON, Naby Keita was booked for a foul on Mane – awkward – as Guinea and Senegal drew 0-0 in Cameroon, while Salah celebrated being named as the Standard Chartered player of the month for December by getting Egypt up-and-running with the winner against Guinea-Bissau.

Mo currently has 148 goals for Liverpool and only four men have ever passed the 200-goals mark: Ian Rush, Roger Hunt, Gordon Hodgson and the iconic Billy Liddell, who was born 100 years ago this month.

Liverpool FC marked King Billy's century by releasing a video and dedicating the front cover of the Liverpool v Brentford matchday programme to him. But inside there was an extremely important article.





SKIPPER'S NOTES JORDAN HENDERSON

For this issue I'm honoured to donate my regular column space to Sir Kenny Dalglish. I want to help raise awareness for the Hillsborough Law campaign, and a topic of this seriousness needs someone who can speak with knowledge, experience and eloquence – someone whom we can all listen and learn from…

A MESSAGE FROM
SIR KENNY DALGLISH

"We need to use the experiences of the Hillsborough families to educate and inform us about the past so that we can be better-prepared for the future"

Following the ITV drama *Anne* – written by Reds fan Kevin Sampson to tell the story of Anne Williams' fight for justice for son Kevin, unlawfully killed in the Hillsborough disaster – the campaign for a Hillsborough Law has gathered pace.

"It would introduce a statutory duty of candour on public servants during all forms of public inquiry and criminal investigation," explained BBC News.

"It also aims to ensure proper participation of bereaved families at inquests, through publicly-funded legal representation, and the provision of a public advocate to act for families of the deceased after major incidents."

In other words, it would stop other families going through what those who lost loved ones at Hillsborough have been through for the last 33 years, and to raise further awareness of the campaign Jordan Henderson donated his programme column to Sir Kenny Dalglish.

"Every affected family will have their own individual story, but they will all share a common theme based on the treatment they received from the authorities at a time when they should have been given support, compassion, transparency, accountability and justice," he wrote.

"Hillsborough Law would not change what those families and the survivors went through, nor would it provide the justice they deserve, but it would offer a recompense, a legacy and a hope that in the future the justice system will not be so loaded against anyone unfortunate enough to find themselves in a similar situation."

On the pitch, Liverpool kicked off a Premier League game without Mane or Salah in their starting XI for the first time since Mo was signed in 2017. For 44 minutes it looked like the Bees were going to frustrate the Reds in the same way that Arsenal had, with the highlight being Matip slaloming his way through the Brentford team like they were flags on the Lillehammer slopes before shooting weakly with his left foot.

Thankfully the prolific Fabinho broke the deadlock a minute before the break when everyone missed an Alexander-Arnold corner, allowing him to head home at the far-post.

As the players went off for the interval, phones were abuzz in the Anfield stands: Everton had sacked Rafael Benitez, prompting chants of 'Rafa, Rafael, Rafael Benitez' on the Kop.





In a weird twist of fate, it happened on the day of Klopp's 350th game in charge of Liverpool – exactly the same number of matches Benitez had led the Reds between 2004 and 2010. By full-time, Klopp had taken his win percentage to 60.86 per cent, a ratio only bettered by John McKenna during his 36 games in charge in 1895/96.

Jota hit the post before Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain met an Andy Robertson cross with a diving header to make it 2-0. On came birthday boy Minamino and when he pressed Alvaro Fernandez the Brentford goalie gave the ball to Firmino who, after an exchange of passes, teed up Taki to make it 3-0.

Only Andy Carroll had ever come off the bench to score for Liverpool on his birthday before and that was in January 2012, a year when the Reds won the League Cup by beating a team in Blue on penalties at Wembley. Just saying.

In the days that followed, all three of our AFCON stars progressed to the knockout stages with Keita getting his first goal of the tournament against Zimbabwe, but then some sad news emerged.

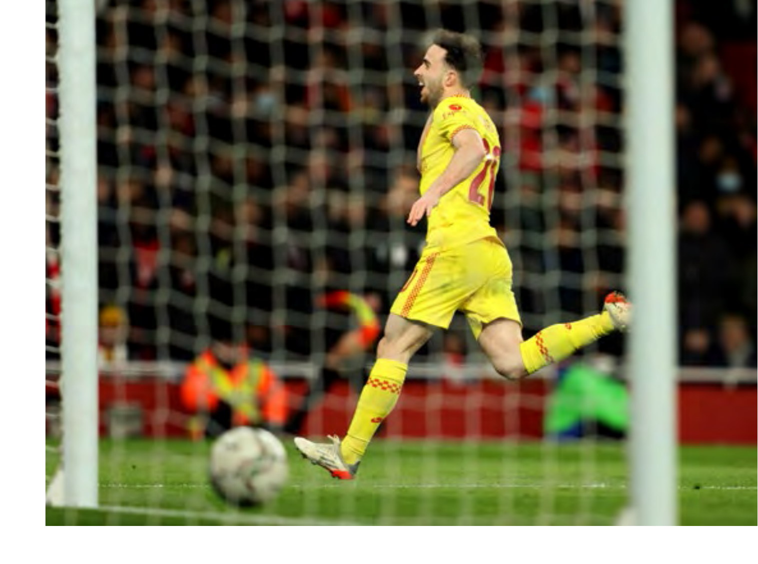
Former Liverpool secretary and chief executive Peter Robinson, who ran the club from 1965 to 2000, passed away at the age of 86. Responsible for the administrative side of things, including everything from overseeing transfers to tickets and sponsorship deals to the building of new stands, Peter's objective was 'freeing managers to focus on their top priority: winning on the pitch'.

Liverpool FC won 28 major trophies during Robinson's 35-year tenure, including 12 league championships and four European Cups. Job done. RIP PBR.

The next opportunity to add silverware to the collection will come against Chelsea on Sunday 27 February thanks to a lad from Portugal, he's better than Figo don't you know? Oh, his name is Diogo.

The Reds' 2-0 Carabao Cup semi-final win against Arsenal at the Emirates was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the season. Priorities can shift when you're living in the moment. An important early save from Kelleher stopped the Gunners from capitalising on their early momentum and then in the 19th minute Jota, playing on the left wing, cut inside and scored for LFC.

Young Gordon, starting in a League Cup semi at 17, missed a chance to make it 2-0, but in the 77th minute Diogo got the job done with another Robbie Fowler-esque finish, dinking the ball over Aaron Ramsdale.



The linesman flagged him off, VAR said he was on, and the Reds were off to Wembley, sparking a trademark triple fist-pump from Klopp in front of a boisterous travelling Kop. A late red card for Thomas Partey (or should we call him Thomas Work Event these days) – on the day he had returned from AFCON to come on as a sub – added to Mikel Arteta's misery.

Just to confuse everybody, FIFA held the draw for the African World Cup play-offs in the middle of AFCON and paired Egypt with Senegal, meaning one of Salah and Mane's nations are guaranteed to go to Qatar in November, but the other is guaranteed not to. Harsh.

Speaking of guarantees, those Reds who went to at least three Carabao Cup games this season are sure of a ticket for the final, but those who went to just the two home games need luck in the ballot.

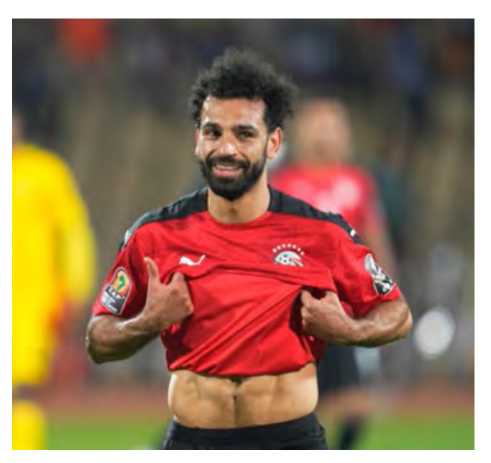
Nervous times, and Liverpool's 3-1 win at Crystal Palace fell into that category too. The Redmen cantered into a 2-0 lead in the first half, Robertson assisting Virgil van Dijk for a powerfully-headed opener and Oxlade-Chamberlain for the snapshot second at the far-post, but then Klopp's men looked like a team in need of a winter-break.

Alisson performed heroics to keep the Eagles to just getting one goal back before a controversial late penalty, awarded following a VAR review for a foul by Vicente Guaita on Jota, allowed Fabinho, aka the new Pele, to score his fourth goal in five games – closing the gap to Man City by two points after they drew at Southampton.

Enjoy the break lads, although Ali, Fab and Taki had World Cup qualifying business to attend to instead.













There were mixed fortunes for our AFCON Reds as the knockout stages began in Cameroon. Naby lad's Guinea were knocked out by Gambia, Sadio scored but was taken to hospital with a head injury in a 2-0 win against Cape Verde and Mo kept his nerve to slot home the winning penalty in a spot-kick success versus Ivory Coast.

Senegal and Egypt also won their quarter-finals, Salah getting a goal and an assist against Morocco, and could yet meet in the final.

Back home, Klopp was named as Premier League manager of the month for December, but the following day there was a poignant occasion at Anfield when Andrew Stanley Devine's name became the 97th etched onto the Hillsborough Memorial.

Andrew's name has also been added to the Memorial at the AXA Training Centre and the club will update their tribute in the 'Anfield Forever' stones located on 97 Avenue.

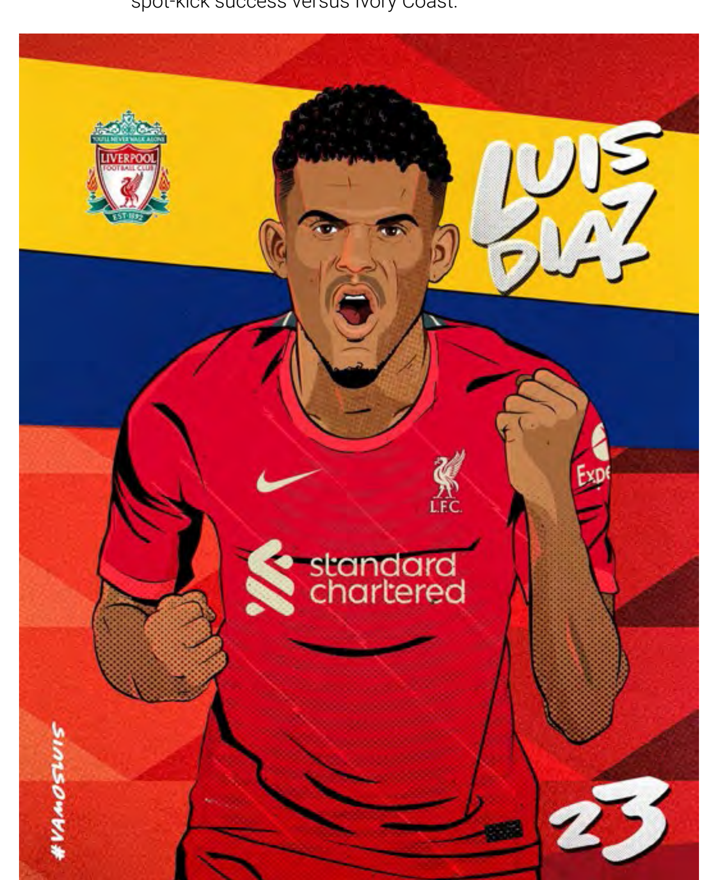
And that was January 2022. Yes, the transfer window was open, but you all know the score. We are Liverpool. Big Summer FC. We never sign anyone.

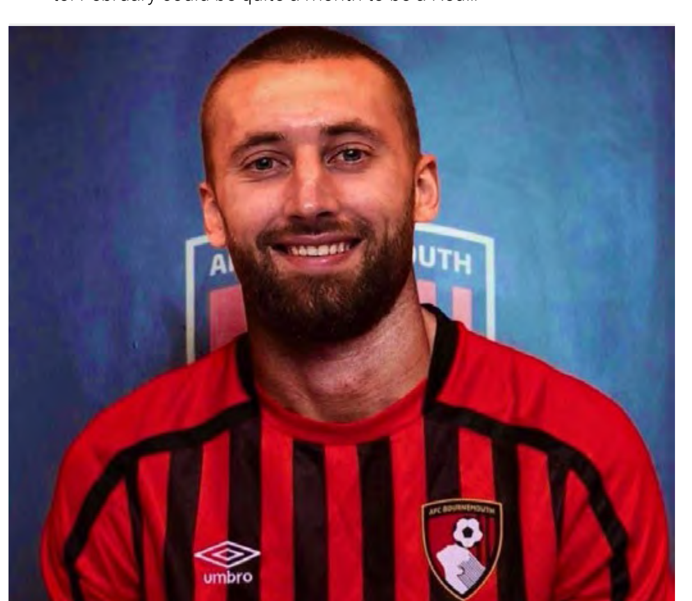
Hang on. What's that? His name is Luis Diaz, he wears the famous Red? You can read all about Liverpool's first Colombian signing elsewhere in the magazine (if you haven't already), but once again the Reds waited to swoop for an exciting attacking player when the manager and club thought the time was right, not when the outside noise demanded it.

A reported deadline-day move for Fulham's young attacking midfielder Fabio Carvalho didn't come to fruition, but Neco Williams' loan move to Craven Cottage did. Nat Phillips will also spend the rest of the season on loan at Bournemouth, where he will no doubt head a few seagulls clear if he needs to.

There was more exciting news: Harvey Elliott is not only back in training, he scored a stunning solo goal in a behind-closed-doors comeback game against Wrexham at Kirkby.

So that's Diaz in, Elliott back, Salah and Mane due to return from Cameroon, the Champions League restarting with a trip to Milan and the Carabao Cup final to look forward to. February could be quite a month to be a Red...





WHAT'S ON

FEB/MAR





ANFIELD SOUTH

The highlight of this month's fixture list is undoubtedly the Carabao Cup final as the Reds bid to win the trophy for a record ninth time.

Liverpool will meet Chelsea in the showpiece occasion at Wembley Stadium on Sunday 27 February with Jürgen Klopp looking to lead his side to victory in the tournament for the first time under his watch. The Reds lost the 2016 final against Manchester City on penalties during the German's first season at the helm.

The Redmen will be aiming to land the 49th major honour of the club's rich history when they meet Thomas Tuchel's side. Both Premier League meetings between the sides this season ended all-square.

Other highlights of the month ahead see the Reds back in UEFA Champions League action when they meet Inter Milan for the first time in 14 years.

Liverpool return to the San Siro for the second time this season when they take on Simone Inzaghi's side in the first leg on Wednesday 16 February before hosting the Italians at Anfield on Tuesday 8 March with a place in the quarter-finals up for grabs.

Meanwhile, the Premier League programme will see Norwich City (19 February) and West Ham United (5 March) pay visits to L4 while the Reds make the long trip down to Brighton on 12 March.

FEB/MAR

WHAT'S ON



LOOK OF THE DRAWS

Should the Reds be successful in their Champions League head-to-head with Inter Milan, all eyes will be on the draw for the quarter-finals and semi-finals.

The pathway to the final at the Gazprom Arena in Saint Petersburg on Saturday 28 May will become clearer when the remaining ties are drawn on Friday 18 March at UEFA's headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland.

In other cup action, Liverpool FC Women will be looking to progress to the quarter-finals of the Vitality Women's FA Cup when they host Arsenal on Sunday 27 February. Should they do so, they will enter the draw for the last eight with ties set to take place on Sunday 20 March.

Meanwhile, Liverpool's Under-19s will find out who they will face in the last 16 of the UEFA Youth League when ties are revealed on Monday 14 February.

BIRTHDAYS

Kevin Keegan 71 on 14 February

Phil Neal 71 on 20 February

Jari Litmanen 51 on 20 February

David Speedie 62 on 20 February

Charlotte Wardlaw 19 on 20 February

Alec Lindsay 74 on 27 February

Katie Stengel 3o on 29 February

Djimi Traore 42 on 1 March

Joey Jones 67 on 4 March

Sir Kenny Dalglish 71 on 4 March

Simon Mignolet 34 on 6 March

Andy Robertson 28 on 11 March



ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...



ANNIVERSARIES

123 years since Alex Raisbeck scored his first goal for Liverpool on 11 February

31 years since that epic 4-4 draw with Everton in the FA Cup on 20 February

35 years since John Aldridge scored on his home debut for LFC on 28 February

44 years since Graeme Souness scored his first LFC goal on 25 February

57 years since a dramatic FA Cup fifth-round win at Bolton on 20 February

96 years since Gordon Hodgson made his LFC debut on 27 February

And it's 19 years since LFC won their seventh League Cup against Manchester United in Cardiff on 2 March 2003...

"It's a great feeling – beautiful," said Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier after seeing his side overcome arch-rivals Manchester United at the Millennium Stadium.

Steven Gerrard's first half goal – deflected off David Beckham – paved the way for a triumphant afternoon for the Reds in the Welsh capital but Liverpool's star turn was the big Pole in goal, Jerzy Dudek, who performed brilliantly to keep Sir Alex Ferguson's side at bay.

"The deciding factor was Liverpool's goalkeeper – Jerzy Dudek was magnificent," admitted the Red Devils boss afterwards.

Liverpool took the lead six minutes before the interval when Gerrard's 25-yarder took a crucial deflection off England captain Beckham and looped over keeper Fabien Barthez.

United could have been level before the break as Dudek blocked midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron's shot before the rebound saw Paul Scholes' attempt cleared by centre-back Stephane Henchoz from under the crossbar.

Dudek twice saved brilliantly to deny Ruud van Nistelrooy and was also at his best to thwart Scholes.

With the game on a knife-edge, the Reds sealed it when Dietmar Hamann released Owen on a counter-attack and he beat Barthez to make sure the trophy headed to Anfield for the second time in three years.

Houllier praised Dudek, whose errors in the league game against United at Anfield a few months earlier had been costly: "I told Jerzy a few days ago that he would be the hero of this game.

"He was unfortunate when we played them last but deserved his man-of-the-match award. This shows you how football is sometimes. One minute you are rock-bottom and the next day you can be a hero again."



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FIXTURES 2021/22

		SCORE	TV	SCORERS
AUGUST				
Sat 14	Norwich City (A, 5.30pm)	3-0	Sky	Jota, Firmino, Salah
Sat 21	**Burnley (H, 12.30pm)**	**2-0**	**BT**	**Jota, Mane**
Sat 28	**Chelsea (H, 5.30pm)**	**1-1**	**Sky**	**Salah (pen)**
SEPTEMBER				
Sun 12	Leeds United (A, 4.30pm)	3-0	Sky	Salah, Fabinho, Mane
Wed 15	**AC Milan (H, UCL Matchday One, 8pm)**	**3-2**	**BT**	**Tomori (og), Salah, Henderson**
Sat 18	**Crystal Palace (H, 3pm)**	**3-0**		**Mane, Salah, Keita**
Tue 21	Norwich City (A, Carabao Cup 3, 7.45pm)	3-0	Sky	Minamino 2, Origi
Sat 25	Brentford (A, 5.30pm)	3-3	Sky	Jota, Salah, Jones
Tue 28	Porto (A, UCL Matchday Two, 8pm)	5-1	BT	Salah 2, Mane, Firmino 2
OCTOBER				
Sun 3	**Manchester City (H, 4.30pm)**	**2-2**	**Sky**	**Mane, Salah**
Sat 16	Watford (A, 12.30pm)	5-0	BT	Firmino 3, Mane, Salah
Tue 19	Atletico Madrid (A, UCL Matchday Three, 8pm)	3-2	BT	Salah 2 (1 pen), Keita
Sun 24	Manchester United (A, 4.30pm)	5-0	Sky	Keita, Jota, Salah 3
Wed 27	Preston North End (A, Carabao Cup 4, 7.45pm)	2-0	Sky	Minamino, Origi
Sat 30	**Brighton & Hove Albion (H, 3pm)**	**2-2**		**Henderson, Mane**
NOVEMBER				
Wed 3	**Atletico Madrid (H, UCL Matchday Four, 8pm)**	**2-0**	**BT**	**Jota, Mane**
Sun 7	West Ham United (A, 4.30pm)	2-3	Sky	Alexander-Arnold, Origi
Sat 20	**Arsenal (H, 5.30pm)**	**4-0**	**Sky**	**Mane, Jota, Salah, Minamino**
Wed 24	**Porto (H, UCL Matchday Five, 8pm)**	**2-0**	**BT**	**Thiago, Salah**
Sat 27	**Southampton (H, 3pm)**	**4-0**		**Jota 2, Thiago, van Dijk**
DECEMBER				
Wed 1	Everton (A, 8.15pm)	4-1	AP	Henderson, Salah 2, Jota
Sat 4	Wolverhampton Wanderers (A, 3pm)	1-0		Origi
Tue 7	AC Milan (A, UCL Matchday Six, 8pm)	2-1	BT	Salah, Origi
Sat 11	**Aston Villa (H, 3pm)**	**1-0**		**Salah (pen)**
Thu 16	**Newcastle United (H, 8pm)**	**3-1**	**BT**	**Jota, Salah, Alexander-Arnold**
Sun 19	Tottenham Hotspur (A, 4.30pm)	2-2	Sky	Jota, Robertson
Wed 22	**Leicester City (H, Carabao Cup 5, 7.45pm)**	**3-3***		**Oxlade-Chamberlain, Jota, Minamino**
Tue 28	Leicester City (A, 8pm)	0-1	AP	
JANUARY				
Sun 2	Chelsea (A, 4.30pm)	2-2	Sky	Mane, Salah
Sun 9	**Shrewsbury Town (H, Emirates FA Cup 3, 2pm)**	**4-1**		**Gordon, Fabinho 2 (1 pen), Firmino**
Thu 13	**Arsenal (H, Carabao Cup S-F 1, 7.45pm)**	**0-0**	**Sky**	
Sun 16	**Brentford (H, 2pm)**	**3-0**		**Fabinho, Oxlade-Chamberlain, Minamino**
Thu 20	Arsenal (A, Carabao Cup S-F 2, 7.45pm)	2-0	Sky	Jota 2
Sun 23	Crystal Palace (A, 2pm)	3-1	Sky	van Dijk, Oxlade-Chamberlain, Fabinho (pen)
FEBRUARY				
Sun 6	**Cardiff City (H, Emirates FA Cup 4, 12pm)**	**3-1**	**ITV**	**Jota, Minamino, Elliott**
Thu 10	**Leicester City (H, 7.45pm)**		**BT**	
Sun 13	Burnley (A, 2pm)			
Wed 16	Inter Milan (A, UCL Ro16 1, 8pm)		BT	
Sat 19	**Norwich City (H, 3pm)**			
Wed 23	**Leeds United (H, 7.45pm)**			
Sun 27	Chelsea (N, Carabao Cup Final, 4.30pm)		Sky	
MARCH				
Wed 2	**Norwich City (H, Emirates FA Cup 5, TBC)**			
Sat 5	**West Ham United (H, 5.30pm)**		**Sky**	
Tue 8	**Inter Milan (H, UCL Ro16 2, 8pm)**		**BT**	
Sat 12	Brighton & Hove Albion (A, 12.30pm)		BT	
Sat 19	Emirates FA Cup 6			
Sun 20	**Manchester United (H, 4.30pm)**		**Sky**	
APRIL				
Sat 2	**Watford (H)**			
Tue 5/Wed 6	UCL Q-F 1			
Sat 9	Manchester City (A)			
Tue 12/Wed 13	UCL Q-F 2			
Sat 16	Aston Villa (A)			
Sat 16	Emirates FA Cup S-F			
Sat 23	**Everton (H)**			
Tue 26/Wed 27	UCL S-F 1			
Sat 30	Newcastle United (A)			
MAY				
Tue 3/Wed 4	UCL S-F 2			
Sat 7	**Tottenham Hotspur (H)**			
Sat 14	Emirates FA Cup Final			
Sun 15	Southampton (A)			
Sun 22	**Wolverhampton Wanderers (H)**			
Sat 28	UCL Final			
TBC	Arsenal (A)			

All fixtures are subject to change.
*Liverpool won 5-4 on penalties (Milner, Firmino, Oxlade-Chamberlain, Keita, Jota)





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NEIL MELLOR

A Wembley cup final, especially after a period when so many games were played behind-closed-doors, will be a great day out for Liverpool fans and a proper game of football

While it is ten years since Liverpool won a domestic cup competition, it reflects the reality that the Carabao Cup and FA Cup have a different importance these days.

For Liverpool supporters going to Wembley to see the Reds play Chelsea it will be a great experience, but the Carabao Cup is nowhere near as important as trying to win the Premier League and Champions League is.

Liverpool can genuinely compete for those two trophies now and the reality is that we have seen managers from some big clubs get sacked after winning domestic cups.

That said, it shouldn't stop the excitement of seeing the Reds play in a Wembley cup final, especially after a period when so many games were played behind-closed-doors. It will be a great day out for Liverpool supporters and with Chelsea providing the opposition it will be a proper cup final.

It is also a different medal for the players to win. A lot of them haven't won the League Cup so they'll want to add that medal to their growing medal collections as Liverpool players.

Back in 2001, Gerard Houllier said the League Cup final win against Birmingham City in Cardiff was the catalyst for Liverpool to win a treble of trophies. The same thing could possibly happen now, but then if you look back to 2005 we lost the League Cup final to Chelsea but went on to win the Champions League in Istanbul, so it can also spur you on if you lose a final.

The big thing for Liverpool is that we want to be winning things. We want to win as much as we can and it is great to be able to look forward to a cup final in February and hope there are a couple more on the horizon.

Jürgen Klopp has already said that Caoimhin Kelleher will start the Carabao Cup final and I have to say I've been really impressed with him.

He's developed by working alongside Alisson, the best goalkeeper in the world, and with John Achterberg and his coaching staff. It's not often when a no2 keeper comes in that you feel quite confident about him, but I feel confident and relaxed when Kelleher is playing.

Harvey Elliott will also hope to be involved at Wembley and it is unbelievable that he has returned to play so quickly. When he suffered his injury at Leeds everybody thought the worst, that he would be out for the season, but he dedicated himself to his rehab and he's back.

You can have distractions in rehab that lead to it not being done properly but Harvey has shown the right attitude and has not only come back ahead of schedule, he looked really sharp when he returned against Cardiff and got his first Liverpool goal.

He's a special talent, but you always wonder how well players will come back from a serious injury. It's early days, but his return just goes to show that the manager didn't need to spend millions in the transfer market because in Elliott he has a player who is not only the real deal but who loves Liverpool Football Club.

The manager did go into the transfer market to sign Luis Diaz and my early impression is that he looks like a player who will settle into what we're about as a football club very quickly.

He's got pace, he's got movement in behind and he is a player who will excite the fans as he makes things happen. I can't wait to see more of him and I cannot believe that his assist for Takumi Minamino's goal against Cardiff was taken off him. He deserves it because he made something happen from absolutely nothing and it gave us all a taste of what is to come.

The question now is who plays upfront? Since 2017 it has been a front three of Roberto Firmino, Sadio Mane and Mo Salah. Then Diogo Jota came in and now with Diaz we have a front-five.

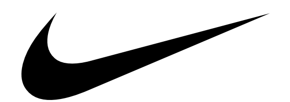
Diaz is a player who could be sensational and we know how good Mane, Salah, Firmino and Jota have been so it will be very interesting to see how the manager rotates and manages their minutes, and with Liverpool still chasing four trophies this season they will all have to play a part if silverware is to return to Anfield.



• Follow Neil on Twitter @NeilMellor33










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